PROPHETIC ACTIVISM: STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG ADULT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS vi

DEDICATION vii

ABBREVIATIONS viii

EPIGRAPH ix

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS 8
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS 27
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS 45
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 69
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS 90
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS 113

    Methodology

    Implementation

    Summary of Learning

    Conclusion

APPENDIX

A. DOCTORAL PROJECT PARTICIPATION FORM 143

B. CONSENT FORM 145

C. PRE-SURVEY 148

D. POST SURVEY 151

E. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 154

BIBLIOGRAPHY 156

ABSTRACT

PROPHETIC ACTIVISM: STRENGTHENING EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS FOR YOUNG ADULT AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

by
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The context of this project is The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship (LMF) program in Washington, D.C. The problem is the program, which assists young men with job placement and college acceptance, has a less-than-acceptable success rate. If the Leading Men Fellowship redesigns its program model to integrate mentoring and small group intervention, then program participants will be more prepared for job placement and college acceptance. The research methodology was participatory, proactive action research. The data revealed that the rate of success is contingent upon opportunity pathways being available to males of color.

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I would first like to thank the Lord for the provision that has followed me as I matriculated from elementary school to my doctorate. I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that have led me to accomplish this goal and the people who have encouraged me along the way. The Lord's faithfulness and grace have been a blessing beyond measure. I want to acknowledge my mother and stepfather, Tracey L. Cooper-Hubbard and Clarence Hubbard; my siblings, Travis, Sade, and Anthony Cooper; and my grandmother, Mary Johnson.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Tracey L. Cooper-Hubbard. I am grateful for your love and support throughout my academic journey. Thank you for being present at all my accomplishments and graduations since elementary school, collecting my certificates and awards, and encouraging me to maintain my grades. I am honored to dedicate this work to you for helping me become the man I am today and will be. A seed you planted in me long ago has now begun to sprout. This is only the beginning of a new journey. Thank you so much. I love you!

ABBREVIATIONS

PLG	Professional Learning Group
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic Social Emotional Learning
GED	General Educational Degree
SMART	Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timebound
CRT	Critical Race Theory
LMF	Leading Men Fellowship
SLT	Social Learning Theory
BLT	Black Liberation Theology

Dreaming of liberation isn't reserved for a select few, like politicians and college professors. Everyone can join the work of moral engineering to redesign, re-narrate, and restructure our economy to work for all of us. Civic awakening – visioning for freedom – is a collective epiphany. It's for all of us.

—Rev. Andrew Wilkes, PhD, co-pastor, Double Love Experience; author, *Plenty Good Room: Co-Creating an Economy of Enough for All*

INTRODUCTION

Overt and systemic racism and oppression have historically stifled the success and prosperity of African American males in America. While a small cadre of African American men has obtained significant academic, career, and personal success, such instances should not overshadow the reality that there are still males of color impacted by internal and external factors that prevent them from success. The foundational chapters for this project address this problem in Washington, D.C., with four major focal points: biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary.

The Biblical Foundations (chapter two) focuses on Ephesians 4:11-13 and the roles of church leaders to equip and build up the body of Christ. The Historical Foundations examined the history of the pursuit of education as a means for racial progress for African Americans and the overt and systemic opposition present then and now. The historical points also focused on ideals of racial progress from W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. The Theological Foundations explore Black Theology, Womanist Theology, and theoethics. The Interdisciplinary Foundations explore Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Social Learning Theory (SLT). All four points expound aspects of this project that will aid in its success and form one thought around the significance of prophetic activism in the community to promote social transformation and change. Ephesians 4:11-13 provides, through its historical and socio-cultural lens and significant themes, a sufficient foundation upon which faith-based organizations can build rationale that creates opportunities for transformational ministry in historically marginalized communities. This pericope underscores the importance of unity within a particular

community and its role in the maturation and progression of that community. Understanding the problem of stifled economic, educational, and social-emotional growth among young men ages eighteen to twenty-four through the lens of this pericope puts the onus on the Church to use its apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to build up the body of Christ. From this process, the community surrounding the local church and Church Universal will experience enhanced and sustainable change.

The Ephesians pericope further provides a biblical foundation for the Kwanzaa principle of Ujima in that both address issues of unity and the collective responsibility of the community to ensure that members are equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to move toward maturity in spirituality and fullness of character. This project will require that people of faith understand that the condition of African American communities is the responsibility of everyone in the local faith community and requires a prophetic voice and imaginative leadership to unite and bring into fellowship individuals historically and systematically pushed to the margins of society.

Chapter Three (Historical Foundations) examines the contributions made by individuals and organizations toward the socioeconomic, educational, and vocational development of Black people in America during the Reconstruction Era (1865) through the end of World War I (1915). Understanding the history of the pursuit of economic stability and educational attainment as a means for socio-economic progress provides a foundation for building sustainable community transformation. True transformation of a society begins with agitating the core of how and why it functions the way it does. At the core of American history are periods of oppression, disenfranchisement, systemic racism, and pure hatred of people of African descent at the costs of capitalism fueled by greed.

Research presents that though the source of economic prosperity of the country was the harvesting and production of cotton and other cash crops by enslaved Africans, White Americans inherited wealth.

The Constitution, including the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and other civil rights laws provided some recourse to African Americans, but at the cost of many Black lives lost in the fight for their freedom. Loopholes in legislation gave way to the birth of vagrancy laws and Black Codes after faux emancipation that later evolved into convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration. However, the Reconstruction Era provided opportunities for African Americans to obtain an education, economic stability, and political influence as America wrestled with integrating African Americans into social, political, and labor systems.

The advancements made by African Americans were met with backlash from Whites who feared that their status in the American racial caste was challenged. They responded through violent physical and legislative attacks on local and national entities assisting Blacks in their pursuit of life, liberty, and equality. In the fifty years of this historical focus, every attempt to hold African Americans in a lower caste has been counter-addressed with Black resistance, physically and legislatively. W.E.B. Du Bois contended with Booker T. Washington on progress, with valid points addressing community, education, vocation, and economics.[1]

Du Bois offered that racial progress comes from political action, education, and the passing on of wealth from parent to progeny, not just a fraction of the race, but

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[1] W. E. B. Dubois, "The Economic Future of the Negro," *Publications of the American Economic Association* 7, no. 1 (1906): 219–42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2999974.

everyone.[2] Washington argued that an education in the trades, agriculture, industry, technology, and racial solidarity would aid in elevating the status of the African American race. Effective change will come from an amalgamation of both ideas, with the assistance of clergy and activists. This history provides a foundation that establishes a culturally relevant, timely, and effective project in transforming communities furthest from opportunities through equipping young men ages eighteen to twenty-four with indispensable personal, life, and career skills. To do so would require a just imagination that would invite the community to develop a faith and work ethos that addresses their socioeconomic, political, and collective lives.

The Theological Foundations (chapter four) examines Black Theology, or Black Liberation Theology (BLT), as it investigates the intrinsic and extrinsic hindrances African American males in Washington, D.C., face in pursuing post-secondary education and career development. In this chapter, Black Theology refers to a study and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices held by African Americans. It is specific to the plight and prosperity of the descendants of enslaved African people in America and centralizes Christianity and American culture. Dr. Frederick Ware offers that African American theology shows that racism, among other forms of injustice, complicates the human predicament, and its eradication requires nothing less than an enlargement of salvation to include the liberation of persons who lack full participation in society.[3] The ideals of Dr. James H. Cone, founder and advocate of Black Theology, are presented

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[2] Lauren A. Wendling, "Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift: The Educational Philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois," *The Journal of Negro Education* 87, no. 3 (2018): 288, https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.3.0285.

[3] Frederick L. Ware, *African American Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 159.

along with womanist perspectives, as both seek to elevate a divine commandment for the liberation of all people.[4]

Both Black and Womanist Theology warrant practical responses to oppression; in most cases, the response is to do justice. Since God cares about the community marginalized by society, clergy and community leaders must work in tandem to actualize a beloved community of radical inclusion. The theology that empowers social justice work is foundational to this project because it explains why it is essential to contribute

to the socio-economic and personal advancement of young adult African American males; God cares about them. Social justice work employs theoethics to ensure that persons receive their equitable share of societal resources and justified treatment with love and grace.

Liberation theologies and social justice ethos can be effective models for cultivating personal maturation and career advancement for young adult African American males in Washington, D.C. Local churches can partner with public schools and other community organizations to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are not stifled but extended to reach them where they are. This can be actualized by employing a theoethical hermeneutic in local churches and taking that message to school boards, regional and national government officials, and other hoarders of wealth and resources. Prophetic activism demands that faith leaders proclaim good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed but also do something about oppression.

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[4] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll: New NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 117.

The Interdisciplinary Foundation Chapter (five) highlights the project's necessity and the impression of various disciplines within the context. It focuses on CRT and SLT and how, if applied simultaneously, they can help address the possible cause of dissociation with urban communities and a possible solution to the vocational and early adulthood disparities faced by eighteen to twenty-four-year-old African American males in Washington, D.C.

CRT and SLT are employed in this chapter to provide a theoretical foundation for the project. CRT addresses the societal and systemic factors embedded in local and national laws that impact the trajectory of young adult African American males in Wards Six, Seven, and Eight in Washington, D.C. SLT provides insight into how the focus group may respond to surrounding social stimuli and how it impacts their internal decision-making. Community is a key tenet of African American or Black culture and the impetus for many individuals' success. Understanding the interconnectedness of African American communities and how young adult males respond individually and collectively can reveal a solution to addressing the problem within the context.

When CRT and SLT are employed, they help community stakeholders assess hindrances to success. Then, it allows them to develop action plans to increase the number of young men in Washington, D.C., who live healthy and prosperous lives. Local young adult ministries and culturally based rites of passage programs can further provide insight into how to engage young men communally and socially to enhance their learning experiences. Fraternal organizations have also done well recruiting, supporting, and developing young males into leaders and providing a structure for current and future stakeholders. The project will combine a prophetic activism framework with the

necessary mentoring and discipleship to help Black males navigate a culturally biased and discriminatory society to pursue academic and career advancement.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

As a teacher, minister, and mentor, I regularly witness how schools, churches, and the African American culture neglect or do not sufficiently provide emotional and mental health support for male youth. By nature and nurture through life circumstances, we are often raised to be mentally and physically tough, hard-working, and emotionally closed off. Additionally, in many church spaces, small groups for adults and young men only address traditional and monotonous topics and do not go beyond the surface to tackle deeply rooted emotional and mental struggles that affect their daily lives. I regularly have parents and teachers inquire about mentorship for their male youth and often discover, through conversation with the youth, that there are unmet mental and emotional needs. They have valid private and shared community challenges but are unprepared to navigate them. My parents provided me with the best living situation they could afford but often, unknowingly, neglected to foster a strong emotional intelligence and self-esteem. They left me to navigate young adulthood on my own. If I could do well in school, keep a job, and stay out of trouble, I appeared to be ok, but I was not and fumbled through my transition into manhood.

My call to ministry includes improving the life outcomes of African American young adult males (aged eighteen to twenty-four) in Washington, D.C.'s, Wards Seven

and Eight. Wards Seven and Eight, commonly known as east of the Anacostia River, house the city's highest number of African American residents and have some of the country's highest unemployment and poverty rates.[1] More than that, Wards Seven and Eight are plagued by problems, including more gun violence and worse health outcomes.[2] Without guidance and mental and emotional support, young adult males residing in Wards Seven and Eight are likely to fall into unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and crime cycles.

Strong mental and emotional health is needed to make effective decisions concerning the life and longevity of oneself. Providing jobs, education, food, and shelter for communities only addresses a part of the socio-economic disparities African Americans experience. It must be coupled with genuine and ongoing care for the lives of individuals experiencing hardships. This is how we can bridge the gap between the local church and the community. Prophetic activism meets at the intersection of ministry and strategic community development from the inside out. Spiritual growth requires that believers put off the old self and take on a new life in Christ through a circumcision of the heart and a renewal of the spirit and mind through spiritual disciplines. If young adult males eighteen to twenty-four years old receive social-emotional and interpersonal skills and ongoing mental health support, they will be more equipped to navigate challenges unique to African American males.

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[1] Amanda Michelle Gomez, "D.C.'s Black-White Unemployment Gap is the Worst in the Nation," DCist, https://dcist.com/story/23/08/10/dc-black-white-unemployment-gap-ward-7-8/.

[2] Julie Zauzmer Weil, "Wards Seven and Eight Have Long Represented Poor, Black D.C. Neighborhoods. What Does it Mean to Redistrict Them?", *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/11/03/dc-redistricting-wards-anacostia-river/.

Context

The Racial segregation has had lasting negative impressions on African Americans since its inception in the early 1800s. Centuries of systematic inequities have impeded African Americans' emotional, economic, and educational development, subsequently creating deficiencies that push them further away from opportunities naturally presented to people of other races/ethnicities without them (i.e., European Americans). For example, children raised in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods are more than four times less likely to enter kindergarten with school-ready reading and language skills than their higher-income peers. Children who do not read on grade level by the end of third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time. Without a high school diploma or equivalent, opportunities in life are dramatically reduced. Said differently, people with low literacy levels have an unemployment rate two to four times higher than those with higher education levels.[3] In Washington, D.C., a sobering difference in the quality of education students receive between Wards Seven and Eight and their counterparts in Wards One through Six contributes to the above statistic.

Unquestionably, structural racism must be addressed through policy change on the local and national levels. There must be political action to eradicate barriers that disproportionately segregate African American communities from access to opportunity and upward mobility.[4] However, with political action, the local church, faith, and nonfaith-based organizations must respond to issues that negatively impact the African American community.

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[3] The Literacy Lab, "The Challenge," The Literacy Lab, https://theliteracylab.org/thechallenge/.

[4] Urban Institute, "Structural Racism," Urban Institute, https://www.urban.org/tags/structural-racism#home.

The Literacy Lab is an organization actively seeking to affect the life outcomes of children in marginalized communities positively. It provides students in communities experiencing racial and economic inequities with evidence-based, culturally responsive literacy instruction to prepare them for academic, professional, and personal success.[5] The Literacy Lab prepares pre-kindergarten students for kindergarten and works to close literacy gaps for kindergarten to third-grade students. Establishing The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship is an additional response to opportunity gaps.

Opportunity gaps are uncontrollable factors like race, language, and economic and family situations that can lower success rates in education achievement, career prospects, and other life aspirations.[6] The Leading Men Fellowship allows Black and Brown (African American/Latinx) young men ages eighteen to twenty-four to explore careers in Early Childhood Education. Leading Men Fellows are young men of color who have recently graduated from high school and participate in a year-long, residency-style experience. They provide evidence-based literacy support to pre-kindergarten students while receiving robust coaching and professional development and gaining valuable experience.

The Leading Men Fellowship finds strength in that it addresses the literacy and opportunity gap for children through evidence-based interventions and provides young men with an opportunity to earn money, get exposed to careers and higher education, and find refuge during a transition period. Since the inception of the program in 2016, it has expanded from Washington, D.C., to include now Fellows in Richmond/Portsmouth,

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[5] The Literacy Lab, "Our Mission," The Literacy Lab, https://theliteracylab.org/about-us/.

[6] Jessie Salas, "What is the Opportunity Gap," Close the Gap Foundation, https://www.closethegapfoundation.org.

Virginia; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Baltimore, Maryland; Atlanta, Georgia; Phoenix, Arizona; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Kansas City, Missouri.[7]

The program's weakness is ensuring that 100% of the Fellows secure employment or enrollment in a post-secondary education entity after the year-long residency. Conversing with Leading Men staff taught me that some Fellows continue in a second year as a Senior Fellow. Still, some of those who do not, and some of those after the second year, are otherwise unemployed or employed in a job not in the field of education. There is currently no tracking system to provide exact data on what happens with Fellows when they complete the program and others who exit it prematurely due to termination or other circumstances.

Another weakness is the lack of direct care for the Fellows' mental health and social-emotional development. There are Professional Learning Group sessions the Fellows engage in monthly that aim to provide professional career development and life skills to the Fellows, but they are often poorly attended. While economic needs are being addressed through earned pay and a financial education award upon completion of the program, mental health and social-emotional care are two factors that go slightly unattended. Mental and emotional health impact an individual's ability to manage stress, address adverse childhood experiences, and make healthy choices conducive to maturation and advancement. With this explicit focus, many Fellows can complete the program and handle personal circumstances unique to African American/Latinx males.

[7] Teebark, "Leading Men," The Literacy Lab, https://theliteracylab.org/leading-men/.

Ministry Journey

My ministry journey has revealed how my interests and skills align with my life's call. Most of my experiences in early life, from undergraduate and graduate school, have been centered around empowering and caring for males of color. I believe God has burdened my heart to ensure the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of the males within my reach. One way I have done this is through a campus ministry. As a founding member and leader of our men's small group, I connected with men on the campus beyond our shared cultural experience. The weekly planned and impromptu group sharing was pivotal in our growth as young men because most of us came from homes and churches that did not have safe spaces for males to be vulnerable. We had to build trust first, but after we did, it was easier for us to share personal triumphs and struggles and identify how we could best support one another.

Many, if not all, of us were the first in our families to attend college, so it was important to us all that we all finished with a degree. I am still connected to this ministry and contribute as much as I can to help other young African American males graduate from college. Building community and group sharing on my undergrad campus enabled me to develop better relationships with my siblings and the young men at the church where I served.

Historically Black colleges and universities have unique ways of impressing upon students the importance of a strong understanding of African American history and culture. While at Howard University School of Divinity, I experienced this through conversations and relationships with peers, course readings and campus lectures, and embracing principles that shape the African American culture. I learned that African

Americans are historically a people of community and that we are most successful when we work together to ensure the future of one another. I found interest in the Kwanzaa principle Kuumba, which means creativity—to always do as much as we can in the way we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.[8] Through our unique gifts and talents, we can create and sustain healthy and whole communities that foster academic and personal success for our African American young men. Kuumba is ignited by a prophetic vision, being able to divinely see how we want our community to look and actualize through the work of our hands. We can leave our communities better than we inherit them by investing in the future of our African American boys and young men.

Mentoring is another area of interest. I have always been, officially or unofficially, in a mentoring relationship since high school. I recognized early in life that I needed a guide to navigate high school and my transition into college, and my mentor did that. He could see a future for me that I did not see and had the financial resources and life experience to expose me to a life outside of what I was familiar with. In my junior year of college, I became a freshman's mentor, unknowingly doing the same for him. Mentors are needed in communities where fathers, father figures, and positive male role models are scarce. More than that, mentors are needed in church spaces where men's and youth ministries are underdeveloped or inoperative to be catalysts for the maturation and coming-of-age boys and young men.

Career mentors are equally important as personal and life mentors. They represent the success and impact a novice can have later in their career and provide practical advice

[8] Maulana Karenga, "Kuumba," Official Kwanzaa Website, https://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/kuumba.html.

that is conducive to career longevity. I was paired with an African American male veteran teacher early in my teaching career. Through our relationship, I could see my career possibilities further and had in-the-moment coaching and support to cultivate my teaching craft. Additionally, my mentor and the mentoring program allowed me to travel outside my community to broaden my perspective on the teaching profession and connect with other Black male educators.

Now, as a mentor in the same program, I am interested in creating sustainable career pathways for young African American men and boys so that they can begin reimagining their future. An elder in the community shared at a meeting held by the D.C. Commission on Fathers, Men, and Boys that boys and young men must see what they can be so they become what they will be. Mentoring is a sure way for African American male youth to be introduced to a future beyond what they can see with the natural eye. Mentoring can be a catalyst for community transformation.

I have acquired many hard and soft skills through my ministry and career journey. The Pastoral Care Practicum course at Howard cultivated an empathy skill in me. Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. I spent a semester as a resident chaplain at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Washington, D.C. I spent many Saturday mornings going from room to room, sitting with veterans and their families, listening to stories, and praying with and for them. As a pastoral care practitioner, I learned how to listen to others and hear their needs or requests. It was not my goal to proselytize those not Christian or impress upon families what I thought to be the proper care, but I was called on to be a beacon of hope and offer relief through prayer, devotion,

and sometimes a ministry of presence. Empathy is an essential skill for any work that requires interpersonal relationships.

Relationship building is a skill I refined during my practicum experience. Many patients were admitted long-term, so I needed to establish a rapport and relationship with them. Relationship building requires empathy, active listening skills, trust, and healthy boundaries. After each session, I journaled about the experience and debriefed with the lead chaplain to strategize how to make the best of my time at the hospital and how I can stretch myself to grow as a minister. Active listening means engaging in conversation by listening to understand and not listening to reply. Trust in a relationship requires vulnerability and courage; this can be cultivated by a willingness to see things from a different perspective without judgment. Boundaries are important because they work as gates to let good things into the relationship, like trust, vulnerability, and commitment. They keep the bad stuff out, like judgment, disregard for physical space and time, and implicit and explicit bias.

Organizing and planning are hard skills I learned through campus and church ministry leadership. I have always worked with a team, but as the leader, I have been responsible for the success of projects and events. On campus, I successfully helped plan and organize Bible studies, services with guest speakers, and gospel concerts that required strategic planning and thorough implementation. Leading a team of peers required that I motivate and inspire those who volunteered and empower them to lean into their unique abilities. Leaders must also have a vision for what they set out to do and the wisdom to use their talents in the ministry best. To bring a project to life, writing the concept with practical steps to actualize it is essential. More than that, project

management requires leaders to plan for unexpected issues and learn how to handle those situations when they occur. Working under stressful conditions helped me to develop the skill of thinking on my feet, problem-solving, and executing.

My campus leadership experiences prepared me to create and operate a mentoring program for boys in grades third and fifth at the elementary school where I worked in my early career as a teacher. Inspired by my relationship with one student, many teachers inquired about how to get their students involved. From that point, I garnered the participation of the men in the building and commissioned them to take on a mentoring relationship with at least one male student. I researched mentoring programs and ministry designs and carefully created a program to fit the needs of that community. The curriculum centered around career and self-esteem building and cultivating healthy relationships with adults conducive to social-emotional and academic development. Time management was essential because I had to be mindful of my time and the time of the gentleman participating in the program. Proper planning allowed for a steady flow of program operations and maximized time mentors could spend with mentees.

An important skill I have applied to various areas of my life is data collection, analysis, and reporting. As a teacher, I always collect student data to track progress and use that data to inform my planning. Data collection can take the form of formal and informal assessments and take seconds to minutes. Data analysis requires me to know what to look for to name the challenge and differentiate instruction to meet every student's needs. I have used data collection in my current ministry context to inform what medium we use to engage with members. After services and events, the executive board meets to discuss our findings regarding attendance, participation, satisfaction, and

member feedback. Data collection is a way to let a ministry and the church know that leaders are present and care about the congregation's needs. When you listen to their thoughts and concerns, decisions can be made in the best interest of the people you serve.

Ministry requires strong interpersonal skills such as communication, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and personal speaking. As a campus ministry leader, leader at my church, and now a leader in my community, I have used all the skills above in some way throughout my journey. These skills have allowed me to learn more about myself and how God can use my unique talents and abilities to create a beloved community. The society we desire to live in as African Americans can be actualized if we use our collective prophetic imagination to reimagine communities where all youth receive sufficient mental and emotional care and have adults who will not give up on them despite statistics.

Synergy

My ministry and vocational career journey are the same. In church and the community, people approach me about the same topic: empowering males of color spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and academically. Individuals inquire about how I can help or ask that I provide them with resources to help a male get from one stage in life to the next. I am asked to be a mentor, tutor, accountability partner, coach, and even a big brother or father figure. I do not find this to be inauthentic because having a male guide was something I desired to have in my boyhood. A recurring theme in both my ministry and the context in which I work daily is the lack of positive male role models in the home and the community. More than that, I hear many stories of children with absent fathers,

physically or emotionally, and how that absence has made it difficult to connect with male youth and subsequently hard to parent. I believe God is using something I have struggled with my entire coming of age to help other African American males navigate challenges in young adulthood.

The mentoring that I have received in my lifetime fostered success that I would not have experienced without it. My engagements with positive male role models and peers filled the emotional wounds created by my absent parent and motivated me to achieve personal and career goals. I do not wish to discredit the women in my life who were instrumental in my rearing, but there is something unique about what fathers and males contribute to the lives of boys and young men. This is not to say that only young men without fathers or father figures experience struggles related to maturation and coming of age. Still, all young men experience similar struggles but in different ways.

The most common issue is the lack of mental and emotional support for African American young men to work through these struggles. Struggles are defined as any barriers or threats to mental and emotional wellness and any factor that impacts personal success and career achievement. Through my Doctor of Ministry project, I intend to explore what happens to the social-emotional development and career achievement of African American men aged eighteen to twenty-four when they are given adequate and consistent mental and emotional care and sufficient career counseling.

My interest in community and relationship building can serve the needs of the participants in the Leading Men Fellowship by cultivating a culture of peer support. Creating a safe space for Fellows to share personal struggles can provide opportunities to connect with peers through group share and allow for transparency to foster trust. Trust

will build relationships. The Fellows enter the program with different life experiences, educational journeys, and career interests, if any. Still, the one demographic that connects them is that they are all African American males from high schools in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. If Fellows engage in guided group sharing and relationship-building exercises, they can create a safe space conducive to their success in the program and life beyond.

One of the requirements to qualify for acceptance into the Leading Men Fellowship is to have a high school diploma or equivalent and not already have a college degree. The program promotes post-secondary education by offering a Higher Education Award upon successfully completing the program and providing sessions on the basics of financial aid and applying for FAFSA. However, a small percentage of the Fellows take advantage of the education award and enroll in college. Data collected on households in Washington, D.C., in 2022 revealed that households with higher educational attainment beyond high school had higher annual incomes. Families with lower educational attainment reported having lower yearly incomes, some just above the city's poverty line.[9] I can use my data collection and analysis skills to gather information on the number of Fellows interested in college and other post-secondary education institutions and their desire to study.

These skills can also assess what barriers, beyond financial aid, hinder pursuing higher education and work to create a system that mitigates them. A digital system can also be designed to track the Fellows' progress through higher education and identify ways to ensure the attainment of degrees, certifications, and licensure. An investment in

[9] MissionInsite, "QuickInsite," MissionInsite, https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-4.

the education of young African American men can improve their current and future socio-economic status.

My success and educational and career attainment result from what is possible when a community invests in the future of youth. My family, church, mentors, peers, and teachers contributed to my desire to live contrary to the stigmas and statistics surrounding African American males raised in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. The Literacy Lab is doing similar work with the Leading Men Fellowship program. It can raise the bar with additional investment in the social-emotional, academic, and career development of the Fellows in the program. My leadership skills in planning and organizing, as well as my ministerial interests in and call to empower males of color, can work simultaneously to improve the life outcomes of these young men. When we invest in their future, we invest in the healthy transformation of some of Washington, D.C.'s, most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The Doctor of Ministry project will be a supplemental resource within the Leading Men Fellowship program. It will be embedded in the Fellowship's programming as professional development sessions or Professional Learning Group (PLG) meetings. Participants will be members of the cohort in Washington, D.C. Availability and interest will determine if the entire cohort of Washington, D.C., will participate or if there will only be a select few. Ideally, ten young men aged eighteen to twenty-four will participate: five new Fellows, three Senior Fellows, and two Leading Men Fellow alumni. Participants will engage in weekly group social-emotional skill-building sessions. Social-emotional learning can be defined as the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities,

manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals. With social-emotional skills, Fellows can empathize with others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.[10]

Fellows will also participate in one-on-one or small group social-emotional learning sessions for more personalized content unique to their experience. The small groups will create an opportunity for the young men to further engage in the content presented in the whole group and provide them with a safe space to share information and ask questions they do not wish to share openly. Small groups can include age, similar life experience, current or post-program goals, current personal goals, physical location, or other shared interests. The whole-group and small-group sessions will be held in person within one of the schools serviced by The Literacy Lab or in person in a setting agreed upon by session leaders and participants.

The project will also provide participants with a mentor of the same gender and race/ethnicity. A Black/African American adult male mentor provides participants with an individual who can empathize with them and possess cultural sensitivity to issues unique to African American men. The mentor will lead the whole- and small-group sessions and hold office hours to check in one-on-one with each program participant. The mentor will be present for the length of the project and will continue throughout the entirety of the school calendar year. Content shared with participants will be topical based on participant interests and needs and will include information and life skills conducive to personal growth and career advancement.

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[10] CASEL, "Fundamental of SEL," Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, https://casel.org.

Small- and whole-group sessions will challenge participants to answer the questions: who am I, who do I want to be, and how will I get there? 'Who Am I' sessions will focus on developing a strong self-identity and self-esteem within the Fellows. Knowledge of self will give young men the self-awareness and confidence necessary to navigate life challenges. Knowing how to address past and current traumas and handle triggers will provide them with the advantage of learning how to handle stressful situations healthily for themselves and those around them. The 'Who Am I' sessions will also give Fellows a safe space to explore emotions such as love, empathy, fear, and joy. These are emotions that typically go unaddressed for young African American males. Fellows will begin to do the emotional work of uncovering who they are by coming face to face with tough self-reflecting discussion questions and prompts to journal independently. With a strong knowledge of who they are, Fellows can begin to build a sense of whom they want to be and will start to make decisions that will align with their divine purpose.

In the 'Who Do I Want to Be' sessions, Fellows will focus on identifying and defining the kind of man they want to be. These sessions will focus on introducing and naming the character traits they want to possess to form healthy definitions of manhood and masculinity. If youth know who they are and want to be, they can create specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-bound, or SMART goals to actualize them. Moreover, naming who they want to be will enhance their self-awareness and how they see themselves in their communities. The Zulu principle of ubuntu—I am because we are—suggests that community is one of the building blocks of humanity.[11] Community

[11] Nkem Ifejika, "What Does Ubuntu Really Mean?" *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2006/sep/29/features11.g2.

building warrants the contribution of gifts and talents of each individual in the community. A call to contribute something to the progression of their community, Fellows will be challenged to pursue their divine purpose in life.

In the 'How Will I Get There' sessions, Fellows will build an action plan to reach the next step in their career and academic journey. The Leading Men Fellowship currently provides resources and information for Fellows to take advantage of, enroll in post-secondary education, or transition into full-time work. Still, they are not required to exit the program, having identified their next steps, nor do they receive help to pursue post-program goals. In this project component, Fellows will receive personalized academic and career counseling to determine their goals after the program. Having identified their next steps, Fellows will work one-on-one with the program mentor to create SMART goals to achieve them. With this process, the mentor will monitor their progress toward their goals and log data in a tracking system that will reveal how the mentor can continue to guide the Fellow best. An analysis of the project's outcomes will determine whether this model can and should be replicated in the remaining Leading Men Fellowship regions.

Through this project, I desire to learn practical ways to teach, motivate, and inspire young African American males. I do not often interact with males aged eighteen to twenty-four, so I must first get to know them and understand what they seek out of life. I remember how it felt to navigate young adulthood during those ages and not have a solid understanding of who I was or what I wanted to do with my life. My faith was the sole factor in motivating me to seek purpose and discern the call on my life. Everyone is

not motivated by religious faith, so I want to learn what will encourage young men to pursue a life beyond their current context.

I am also seeking to learn more about the extrinsic factors in the local community that contribute to the strain and progression of the maturation of young adult men. Every Fellow, though similar in demographic, is affected by their local communities, if at all, in unique ways. Once those factors are identified, I will know best how, or if, the church can help mitigate threats to maturation and goal attainment. I desire to use my ministerial and professional skills and interests to stimulate personal and career growth and ultimately transform a community similar to the one I was raised in. I seek to learn how this project can become a ministry model for churches, K-12 schools, faith- and non-faith-based organizations, and families with African American boys and young men. To build a bridge between the cross and the community, ministers and laypeople must first know what internal and external factors contribute to the community's socioeconomic hardships and concerns. Then, we must work collaboratively to actualize the prophetic vision of the people.

Conclusion

The context of this project is The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship program. The Leading Men Fellowship introduces young men aged eighteen to twenty-four to careers in early childhood education. It is a year-long residency-style program that develops the participants' professional skills while preparing students to become lifelong readers. The program has cohorts of Fellows in eight cities, but the context for this project is the Washington, D.C., cohort. Students receiving reading interventions

provided by the Fellows are showing success on the pre-established benchmark assessments. Still, the Fellows themselves are not demonstrating mastery of personal growth or professional development skills. They are not transitioning from the program into full-time employment or post-secondary educational institutions at desired rates.

If the Leading Men Fellowship embeds a supplemental resource in the program that targets the specific social-emotional and professional needs of the Fellows, then the program will see an increase in the number of Fellows who complete the program and transition into careers or post-secondary education. Fellows will engage in whole-group, small-group, and individual-style interventions and must communicate with a program mentor. Interventions will be administered in a conversation-style format at an elementary school supported by The Literacy Lab. I expect 80-95% of the participants to enroll in a post-secondary educational institution or be employed in a career conducive to economic and employment advancement.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Ujima, a principle of Kwanzaa, is defined as a community's collective work and responsibility to build and maintain its welfare. Ujima commissions a group of people to identify and assess the issues and deficiencies specific to their context and work to solve them together. African Americans and other communities throughout the African diaspora have historically lived out Ujima through the work of faith communities. The Black Church, Christian congregations, and predominately Black denomination—Black referring to African Americans and other groups of people of African descent—have thus been the impetus for the progression of African Americans in areas including but not limited to civil rights, education, entertainment, politics, healthcare, and social justice.[1]

The Black Church, a center point for African American life, was the cultural cauldron that Black people created to combat a system designed to crush their spirit.[2] To persevere through centuries of systemic racism and discrimination, the multi-functional Black Church invites people to develop solid Christian discipleship and gain awareness

[1] Frederick L. Ware, *African American Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 206.

[2] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "How the Black Church Saved Black America," *The Harvard Gazette*, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/.

of injustice to advocate for community development adequately. Community development addresses economic development, infrastructure, housing rehabilitation, public safety and health issues, educational inequalities, public service, homeowner assistance, and more.[3] Such issues persist in Black communities despite many efforts to mitigate or eradicate them effectively.

Illiteracy is a pressing issue in Washington, D.C.'s, Ward Seven and Ward Eight. Seven out of ten fourth graders in Washington, D.C., are not proficient in reading, and children who do not read on grade level by the end of third grade are less likely to graduate from high school on time. Without a high school education, opportunities, such as employment, are dramatically reduced; low literacy levels correlate to high unemployment rates and lead to a low quality of life. Wards Seven and Eight experience more occurrences of violent crime than any other Ward; they have elevated health disparities and limited access to quality produce and groceries.

Wards Seven and Eight are populated predominately by African American families. These Wards, east of the Anacostia River, have the most significant economic disparities across the city.[4] Subsequently, zip codes 20019, 20020, and 20032 have the highest percentages of African American students in the District of Columbia Public School system and the lowest literacy rates. Data provided by D.C. public schools

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[3] U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Community Development," U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/communitydevelopment.

[4] Erica Williams, "D.C.'s Extreme Wealth Concentration Exacerbates Racial Inequality, Limits Economic Opportunity," *The District's Time* (blog), D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, Oct. 20, 2022, https://www.dcfpi.org/all/dcs-extreme-wealth-concentration-exacerbates-racial-inequality-limits-economic-opportunity/#:~:text=In%20DC%2C%20white%20households%20have,to%20cement %20white%20economic%20dominance.

showed that at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, 28% of Black and 30% of Hispanic students were considered proficient on a test administered in fall 2021, and 70% of White students hit these benchmarks.[5]

The Literacy Lab is an organization working to combat illiteracy in Washington, D.C. and improve the quality of life for its residents. The Literacy Lab deploys literacy tutors throughout the city to provide evidence-based literacy intervention to pre-kindergarten to third-grade students to close opportunity and achievement gaps created by systemic racism and educational inequity. Through its Leading Men Fellowship Program, they employ and train African American and Latinx males aged eighteen to twenty-four to be literacy tutors while providing them with personal and professional development opportunities. Fellows work in pre-kindergarten classrooms in schools throughout Wards Six, Seven, and Eight. After their year as a Fellow, participants can sign on to do a second year as a Fellow, but most of the participants who do complete the program do not.

Based on my current context as an educator and minister of the Gospel, I am persuaded to develop a ministry project that attempts to ignite community transformation and development by cultivating leadership skills and strong moral character within young adult African American males. If the participants in the Leading Men Fellowship program engage in culturally relevant and evidenced-based social-emotional and professional development interventions, they will have increased access to positive and

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[5] Perry Stein, "Literacy Scores Show Widening Achievement Gap in D.C. During Pandemic," *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/17/dc-schools-achievement-gap-pandemic-reading/?nid=top_pb_signin&arcId=2IFDJPNSABD6VM5RE4CJSNTOQE&account_location=ONSITE_HEADER_ARTICLE.

supportive pathways to pursue college and careers in education that will then lead to greater social, emotional, and economic advancement opportunities traditionally unreserved for men of color within historically marginalized communities.

Foundational to the project is the pericope of Ephesians 4:11-13.[6] In this passage, the author writes to encourage readers and listeners to consider the gifts given to the church by God and the church's responsibility to do the work of the Lord to build up the body of Christ. This chapter establishes the biblical foundation of the project based on themes of community building, transformational ministry, unity, personal character development, and mental health.

Exegesis

Ephesians – The Book: Literary Analysis

Ephesians, written near the end of the first century, appears in the biblical canon in the New Testament books within the genre of books classified as letters or epistles ascribed to the authorship of Paul the Apostle. Though ascribed to Paul, there are marked distinctions from several ideas found in genuine Pauline letters, contributing to some scholars labeling Ephesians as deuteropauline instead of authentic.[7] The letter lacks evidence of any previous relationship of the apostle to the church at Ephesus. Paul's letters contain specific details of the relationship he has with the audience to whom he

[6] Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Ephesians 4:11-13.

[7] Martin Kitchen, *Ephesians. New Testament Readings* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), 4, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=179775.

writes. Ephesians also differs from other letters in that it encourages readers to imitate God, while additional notes point to Paul as the exemplar for Christian living.

Paul's letters addressed a specific conflict situation, as in Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Colossians, but Ephesians does not. The letter is not written in response to a conflict; the author writes to an audience to encourage them to keep growing in their new life as believers by stopping former sinful practices. Additionally, scholars suggest that the letter was not written solely to Ephesus but was a letter that circulated through many churches.[8] Authorship is further debated due to Ephesians' literary dependence on Paul's authentic letter to the Colossians. One-third of the content of Colossians is found in Ephesians. Words such as mystery (1.9, 3.3, 5.32, 6.19), economy (1.10, 3.29), and fullness (1.10, 3:19) are used in different senses and seem artificial.[9]

Ephesians reads like "a legal document detailing a corporate merger of two major bodies—one foreign (Gentiles) and one domestic (the circumcision)."[10] The style of the letter is pleonastic, that is, marked by repetitions and redundancies. The letter has long sentences that constitute single sentences in Greek, has repetition, and piles up adjectives, phrases, and clauses such as the scriptures in 1:17-19, 2:13-18, and 3:14-19. The lack of personal address and rhetorical appeals to the adults suggests mirror reading, giving access to what literary critics call "implied readers."[11] The discourse in the letter

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[8] Kitchen, *Ephesians*, 6.

[9] Kitchen, *Ephesians*, 6.

[10] Mitzi J. Smith, "Ephesians," in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, eds. Brian K Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Jannette Martin, and Emerson B. Powery (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 348.

[11] Pheme Perkins, "Remembering the Apostle: Genre, Character, and Sources," in *Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 45.

alternates between the second-person plural "you" and the first personal plural "we." "You" is sometimes reserved for Gentile converts, while "we" is used for Jewish Christians. The word "we" is also used to address and identify all Christians as a group. Still, Ephesians never uses the common Christian designation "brothers" in addressing the audience until the letter's conclusion, where it is a third-personal plural reference.[12]

This pericope is enclosed within the section of Ephesians titled Unity in the Body of Christ. It is preceded by Chapter Three, which includes discourse pertaining to establishing a new life in Christ, and succeeded by Chapter Five, which includes exhortations to walk or live in the light of a new life. The structure of Ephesians is as follows:

1. Greeting (1:1-2)
2. The Great Prayer and Meditation (1:3-3:21)
    a. The Blessing of God (1:3-14)
    b. Paul's Prayer (1:15-23)
    c. A Reminder of What God Has Already Done in Them (2:1-10)
    d. The New Humanity (2:11-22)
    e. Paul's Stewardship of the Great Mystery (3:1-13)
    f. The Opening Prayer Resumed (3:14-21)
3. The Exhortation (4:1 – 6:20)
    a. The Church in its Calling and Confession (4:1-6)
    b. The Character and Purpose of Ministry in the Body of Christ (4:7-16)
    c. How to Live as the Church in the World (4:17-32)
    d. Walking in the Light (5:1-20)
    e. Household Rules (5:21-6:9)
    f. Put on the Armour of God (6:10-20)
4. Conclusion and Benediction (6:21-4)[13]

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[12] Smith, "Ephesians," 47.

[13] John Barton and John Muddiman, *Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1167, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Ephesians – The Book: Historical Analysis

Ephesus, located on the most western edge of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), was a strategic port city on the Aegean Sea on the main route from Rome to the east.[14] The ancient history of Ephesus is unclear, but it is recorded that in the seventh century B.C., Ephesus fell under the role of Lydian kings. The city began to flourish due to the business district that opened around 43 B.C. to service the massive amounts of goods arriving and departing from the harbors. Ephesus was considered second to only Rome as a cosmopolitan center of culture and commerce.[15]

The historical chronology of events is as follows: (1) In 546 B.C., Ephesus fell to the Persian Empire along with the rest of Anatolia; (2) in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and entered Ephesus; (3) in 323 B.C., Lysimachus, one of Alexander's generals, took over the city after Alexander's death and renamed it Arsineia; (4) in 281 B.C., Lyscimachus was killed at the Battle of Corupedium, and the city was renamed Ephesus again; (5) in 263 B.C., Ephesus fell under Egyptian rule. Ephesus later fell under Pergamon's rule after the Seleucid king of Antiochus III took the city back but was defeated at the Battle of Magnesia.[16]

Ephesus began to decline in 262 A.D. after the Goths destroyed the city, including the Temple of Artemis.[17] Emperor Theodosius eradicated the influences of Artemis,

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[14] UNESCO, "Ephesus," The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/ephesus.

[15] UNESCO, "Ephesus," The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/ephesus.

[16] Joshua J. Mark, "Ephesus," World History Encyclopedia, https://www.worldhistory.org/ephesos/.

[17] Joshua J. Mark, "Ephesus," World History Encyclopedia, https://www.worldhistory.org/ephesos/.

banning free worship, closing schools and temples, and stripping women of their rights; temple ruins were used to build Christian churches. Ephesus also declined as Constantine the Great declared Christianity the official religion of all of Rome and made Constantinople the capital of the Roman Eastern Empire.[18] With a new, fast-growing city, Ephesus' importance declined due to deteriorating conditions and silt building within the harbors.[19] Sediment filled the port areas that later closed them indefinitely. The city later relied on the tourism of iconic places of worship to support the struggling economy, but conditions persisted. In the sixth and seventh centuries A.D., Ephesus experienced earthquakes, further deteriorating harbor conditions that eventually left no connection to the sea, and Arab invasions that forced much of the population to migrate and settle in new areas. The Ottoman Empire gained control of Ephesus in the fifteenth century but later abandoned it because of the impossibility of revival.[20]

Ephesians – The Book: Social/Cultural Analysis

Ephesus was brought to its most prosperous time under Roman rule due to reforms by Caesar Augustus in 27 BCE. The largest Metropolis of Asia Minor, Ephesus, was comprised of 200,000 citizens and 25,000 slaves. Ephesus then became the seat of

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[18] Sabine Ladstatter and Michaela Binder, "Byzantine Ephesus: Life in the City after Empire," *Current World Archaeology*, no. 82 (March 2017): https://www.world-archaeology.com/issues/byzantine-ephesus-life-in-the-city-after-empire/.

[19] Sabine Ladstatter and Michaela Binder, "Byzantine Ephesus: Life in the City after Empire," *Current World Archaeology*, no. 82 (March 2017): https://www.world-archaeology.com/issues/byzantine-ephesus-life-in-the-city-after-empire/.

[20] Sabine Ladstatter and Michaela Binder, "Byzantine Ephesus: Life in the City after Empire," *Current World Archaeology*, no. 82 (March 2017): https://www.world-archaeology.com/issues/byzantine-ephesus-life-in-the-city-after-empire/.

the government and a major center of commerce.[21] It was the center of art and culture and a meeting place for philosophy. Under the Romans, being a free city, it enjoyed the right of self-government to a great extent.[22] The governing authority was vested in a senate and the assembly of the people. The town clerk of Ephesus, or recorder, was an officer in charge of the city's archives, the promulgator of the laws, and had great authority, and it was by his authority that the riot mentioned in Acts 19:24-41 was dispersed.[23]

Paul arrived in Ephesus in 52 A.D. when paganism and mysticism were popular. It was the culture of the city for Ephesian people to participate in black magic, astrology, orgies, and occult practices; superstition and sorcery were commonplace.[24] Ephesus was the center of the cult of Artemis, the Greek goddess of chastity and childbirth, also known as the savior of laboring women.[25] Ephesian Artemis's cult was widespread in the Greco-Roman world and the eastern Mediterranean area.[26] Artemis was represented by a carved female figure with many breasts. Ephesians were known for their reverence for Artemis, also known as Diana, and the temple dedicated to her was one of the city's major attractions. The temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was built

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[21] UNESCO, "Ephesus," The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/ephesus.

[22] Charles Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Ephesians*, eds. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 11.

[23] Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries,* 11.

[24] Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries,* 11.

[25] Dorothy A. Lee, *The Ministry of Women in the New Testament: Reclaiming the Biblical Vision for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 111.

[26] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Paul's Universal Mission and Testimony (15:36–22:21)," in *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: The Anchor Yale Bible, 1998), 570-709, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300261660.0010.CH006.

and destroyed seven times, each being rebuilt with greater magnificence and revered in Greece and Asia.[27]

The temple, with vast dimensions, costly materials, statues and paintings, and extended colonnades, gave unity to the city and character to its inhabitants.[28] One of the most profitable occupations was coin and shrine making in the likeness of Diana. Craftsmen made charms, amulets, and miniature representations of the temple in silver.

Luke details Paul's journey through Ephesus in the biblical book of Acts. Luke writes about Paul and his preaching and debating arguments about the Kingdom of God in synagogues, disrupting and challenging the authority of Artemis of the Ephesians, or Diana. Paul's message implied the important role of Jesus of Nazareth in the Kingdom. It established it as "the Way," which reveals that the kingdom of God is closely tied to the person of Jesus, especially as the risen Christ.[29]

For Demetrius, a silversmith in Ephesus, Paul's successful preaching was religious but political, disrupting the cult's strength and unity.[30] Paul's evangelical efforts diverted people away from worshiping Artemis and purchasing silver miniature shrines. With the people of Ephesus turning away from occult practices, the wealth and well-being of silversmiths who depended on the business of craftmaking were challenged. Demetrius summoned other workers in related crafts to alert them of the threat to their

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[27] Edward Falkener, *Ephesus and the Temple of Diana* (London, UK: Day and Son, 1862), 11-12, https://archive.org/details/ephesustempleofd00falkuoft/page/12/mode/2up.

[28] Hodge, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries,* 11.

[29] Fitzmyer, "Paul's Universal Mission," 526-527.

[30] Fitzmyer, "Paul's Universal Mission," 527.

business and incites a riot. Demetrius's criticism touches on quantitative, geographical, economic, and religious aspects of the issue he brings before his guildsmen.[31]

Ephesians – The Book: Major Themes

In Ephesians, the Pauline image of the Church as the body of Christ has been expanded to include the idea of Christ as the head of the body.[32] One great theme of Ephesians is the cosmic status and role of the Church.[33] The word ekklēsia is used to identify the Church universal in Ephesians, and the church is understood to be part of uniting "all things," which Christ's sovereign rule represents.[34] It is through the Church, written in Ephesians 3:6, that Gentiles have become "fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise" bestowed upon the Jews, and reconciled along with them to God and therefore united with them in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22).[35]

> This participation of the gentiles in the promises of God is perceived to be a fundamental part of the divine "plan" (*oikonomia*) "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). It is therefore the content of "the mystery of the gospel" (6:19) which is also called "the mystery of [God's] will" (1:9), "the mystery of Christ" (3:4; cf. "the unsearchable riches of Christ," 3:8), and simply "the mystery" (3:3). This "mystery plan" (3:9; RSV: "plan of the mystery") was hidden from all preceding generations (3:5), but now the Spirit has disclosed it to the Church's "holy apostles and prophets" (3:1-6).[36]

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[31] Fitzmyer, "Paul's Universal Mission," 526-527.

[32] David Noel Freedman et al., eds., The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, vol. 2, D-G (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 539, https://doj.org/10.5040/9780300261882-423.

[33] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[34] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[35] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[36] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 539.

In Ephesians, the Church is also presented as the constituent part of the revelation of unity between Jews and Gentiles. The Church shares the cosmic status because of the "fullness" of Christ; it is the place where new humanity has been created and where a cosmic peace has been instituted, and it is central to the divine purpose that "through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."[37] True inheritance of eternal life is also a theme in Ephesians. The Church is perceived as an integral part of God's eternal plan and purpose, having an existence that transcends time.[38] Believers were chosen for salvation "in the heavenly places … before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:3-4), "destined" to be God's sons and to receive the grace bestowed in Christ (Eph. 1:5-6), and "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand" (Eph. 2:10).[39] Because it is through their incorporation into Christ's body, the Church, that believers come into possession of their true inheritance, one may properly describe the eschatology of Ephesians as "ecclesiological."[40]

Paul uses Ephesians to locate Christ in the eternal plan of God and set it in a cosmic context. God's eternal plan is that the entire cosmos should be summed up in Christ.[41] The "heavenly realms" is a recurring word, linking together most of the key themes of the letter: our spiritual blessings are there (v. 3); Christ is "seated" there (v.

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[37] Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[38] Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[39] Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[40] Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 539.

[41] Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ,* ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 266-267, https://thedtl.on.worldcat.org/search/detail/1249799392?queryString=Major%20themes%20in%20Ephesians.

20); we are therefore "seated" there with him (Eph. 2:6); the wisdom of God is made known to "rulers and authorities" there (Eph. 3:10); we carry on our warfare there (Eph. 6:12).[42]

Ephesians' socio-political theme emphasizes living with new privileges and standards and the relationship to power. As the heavenly realm is discussed, the source of power and control within any kingdom draws on the elements of fear and highly rigid roles for most people.[43] We must pay attention to the relationship that is encouraged between citizens and the lord or king in the spiritual kingdom of heaven.[44] The passage giving instructions to persons occupying different roles in the household, customarily called the "household code," must be seen as making claims to restrict and control times of granting relative freedom to the various people within the household structure.[45]

Ephesians – The Book: Word Studies

In this section of the chapter, the focus will be an analysis of several words. Emphasis is made on the following words listed in the order of their appearances in the biblical text: (1) prophet (Eph. 4:11); (2) equip (Eph. 4:12); (3) body of Christ (Eph. 4:12); (4) unity (Eph. 4:13), and (5) maturity (Eph. 4:13). The analyses of these words provide significant insight into the message of the Ephesians pericope.

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[42] Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 266-267.

[43] Margaret P. Aymer et al, eds., *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 528, https://thedtl.on.worldcat.org/search/detail/910446840?queryString=fortress%20commentary%20on%20the%20bible%20ephesians&clusterResults=false&groupVariantRecords=true.

[44] Aymer, *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, 528.

[45] Aymer, *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, 528.

The first word, “prophet,” derives from the Greek word prophētēs, a noun that was used to translate the Hebrew noun navi’ in early Greek versions of the Old Testament.[46] Prophēteuō, a related Greek verb, translates the Hebrew verb nabba’ (“to prophesy”). That usage continues since most English translations of the Old Testament use both the noun prophet and the verb prophesy to translate these same Hebrew words.[47]

The terms prophet and prophecy in the New Testament designate a variety of phenomena, including speech that names injustice or that builds up the community, revelatory visions and ecstatic utterances, altered states of consciousness, and symbolic actions that unmask and challenge the prevailing powers.[48] Prophetic speech is not merely predictive but combines aspects of memory, tradition, and hope to awaken vision and resistance.[49] Prophets arose, especially in times of conflict and injustice.[50]

The second word, “equip,” is a verb that begins the phrase “equip the saints for the work of the ministry” in Ephesians 4:12. To equip, in this sense, means to prepare (someone) with a skill. It can refer to tangible resources such as tools, equipment, or supplies, as well as intangible ones like education, training, or information.[51] It is a transitive verb meaning to “make ready” to furnish for action by appropriate

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[46] Katharine Doob Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), Me-R.

[47] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Me-R.

[48] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Me-R.

[49] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Me-R.

[50] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Me-R.

[51] Definitions, "Equip," Definitions.net, https://www.definitions.net/definition/equip.

provisioning. Equip further suggests providing something for efficiency in action or use.[52]

The third phrase, "body of Christ," is used and developed with references to the relationship of Christians to Christ Jesus and, therefore, to God the Father and all other believers in Jesus.[53] In Colossians and Ephesians, the body language is developed by explicitly identifying the church as the body of Christ: in Colossians 1:18 ("he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church") and 1:24 ("his body, which is the church"); and in Ephesians 1:22-23 ("the church, which is his body") and 5:23 ("Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior").[54]

The body of Christ has often been interpreted as an ontological reality that constitutes the basic definition of the church in the New Testament.[55] Just as Jesus walked the hills of Galilee in a human body, the church today is the incarnation of Christ in human form and, therefore, the divinely ordained means of grace for the justification and sanctification of God's people.[56] Others have considered the phrase merely an extension of Greek body language that Paul used to describe the voluntary association of Christians with one another.[57]

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[52] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "Equip," Merriam-Webster.com, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equip.

[53] Katharine Doob Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 60.

[54] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 60.

[55] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 61.

[56] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 61.

[57] Sankenfeld, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 61.

The fourth word, "unity," is a noun used in the phrase "come to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God in Ephesians 4:13. Unity derives from the Anglo-French *unite* (c. 1300), meaning the "state or property of being one," and from the Latin *unitatem* (nominative *unitas*) meaning "oneness, sameness, agreement."[58] Used theologically, unity describes the oneness between the members of the Godhead, the relationship between God and believers through Jesus Christ, and the relationship of believers in Christ with one another in the church.[59]

The fifth word, "maturity," derives from the Latin mātūrus and, if used as an adjective, means having fully developed powers of the body and mind, having reached full natural growth.[60] In psychology, maturity is the ability to respond to the environment appropriately. This response is generally learned rather than instinctive and is not determined by one's age. Maturity also encompasses being aware of the correct time and place to behave and knowing when to act appropriately, according to the circumstances and the culture of the society one lives in.[61]

Conclusion

Ephesians 4:11-13 provides, through its historical and socio-cultural lens and significant themes, a sufficient foundation upon which faith-based organizations can

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[58] Harper Douglas, "Etymology of Unity," Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/unity.

[59] Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 587, https://search-ebscohost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=780304&site=ehost-live.

[60] Harper Douglas, "Etymology of Mature," Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/mature.

[61] Definitions, "Maturity," Definitions.net, https://www.definitions.net/definition/maturity.

build rationale that creates opportunities for transformational ministry in historically marginalized communities. This pericope underscores the importance of unity within a particular community and its role in the maturation and progression of that community. Understanding the problem of stifled economic, educational, and social-emotional growth among young men ages eighteen to twenty-four through the lens of this pericope puts the onus on the Church to use its apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to build up the body of Christ. From this process, the community surrounding the local church and Church Universal will experience enhanced and sustainable change.

The theme of unity further centers on Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus and surrounding places of worship. Paul emphasized the intent of the Gospel to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians in fellowship, proclaiming that Gentiles are now included in the salvation and inheritance promised to those who believed. Community is about interdependence, recognizing that every life in a community is, by definition, interdependent, filled with trusting relationships, and empowered by the collective wisdom of citizens in discourse.[62]

The themes of prophetic voice and the equipping of or building up the body of Christ work in concert. For African American churches to effect change in the larger African American community, the church must retrieve its prophetic voice.[63] Smith writes that God has given us the power and gifts to speak prophetically. Instead of relinquishing the work of community empowerment and uplift to nonprofit and

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[62] John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterfeits* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1995), 123.

[63] Smith, "Ephesians," in *True to Our Native Land,* 356.

governmental agencies, the church must boldly speak out and do what is necessary to provide services to our communities in need.[64]

Imaginative church leadership is a subtheme within prophetic voice in that, like Paul in Ephesus, prophets must speak against what is wrong and declare what is to be. Real change will not come until the conditions of people experiencing poverty and the lives of individuals experiencing educational inequality, housing insecurity, and unemployment are changed.[65] Imaginative church leadership moves beyond what is honorific and ornamental and addresses why, like many communities in Washington, D.C., Wards Seven and Eight are single-parent homes disintegrating into violence, have low literacy rates, and have high unemployment.

The Ephesians 4:11-13 pericope provides a biblical foundation for the Kwanzaa principle of Ujima in that both address issues of unity and the collective responsibility of the community to ensure that members are equipped with the knowledge and resources necessary to move toward maturity in spirituality and fullness of character. This project will require that people of faith understand that the condition of African American communities is the responsibility of everyone in the local faith community and requires a prophetic voice and imaginative leadership to unite and bring into fellowship individuals historically and systematically pushed to the margins of society.

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[64] Smith, "Ephesians," in *True to Our Native Land,* 356.

[65] Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 218.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the contributions made by individuals and organizations toward the socioeconomic, educational, and vocational development of Black people in America during the Reconstruction Era (1865) through the end of World War I (1915). The hindrances to attaining economic stability and prosperity for Black people, ideas about education on vocation, and the history of the role of the Black Church in community building, as it pertains to moral uplift, are examined. Such topics are further reviewed through the lens of scholar-activists and social thought leaders W.E.B Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, as their assessment and critiques on the conditions of Black people are presented. The chapter concludes with how the history of efforts to progress the state of Black people is foundational to the doctoral project.

Caste systems are an "artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning."[1] In consideration of race, Black people in America assume a lower caste position at birth

[1] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York, NY: Random House, 2020), 17.

because of imposed inferiority from individuals who subscribe to a belief in racist ideologies, and "because they are black and for no other reason"[2] This lower position in the caste system attempts to stifle the growth of Black people in that society prematurely sets the limits on progress and prosperity because the expectation for Black people is not to "aspire to excellence [but] make peace with mediocrity."[3]

Michelle Alexander, in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, offers that since the founding of the nation, "African Americans [Black people] repeatedly have been controlled through institutions such as slavery and Jim Crow."[4] These institutions, now including mass incarceration, have worked in tandem with legislation to oppress Black people systematically. Alexander suggests that though individual Black achievement in formerly White domains may indicate the death of the old Jim Crow, it does not imply the end of racial caste. Instead, caste systems are "reborn in new form [and are] tailored to the needs and constraints of the time."[5] Institutions that seek to oppress individuals based on race can be reformed into policy and or legislation on local and national levels.

Black people have undoubtedly made advances in the attainment of education, vocation, socio-economic status, and political power since the Reconstruction Era until the present day. Still, individual progress should not overshadow the existence of a persistent racial caste system. "The long sweep of America has been defined by the two

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[2] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 7.

[3] Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 7.

[4] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), 21.

[5] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 21.

forward motions: one force widening the embrace of Black Americans and another force maintaining or widening their exclusion."[6] Dr. Ibram X Kendi writes that the "myth of singular racial progress veils this conflict and it veils the snowballing racism behind Black people today still weathering the highest unemployment and incarceration rates and the lowest life expectancy and median wealth compared to other racial groups."[7]

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B Du Bois puts forward the idea that Black people in America are born with a veil in which they see themselves only through the lens of other people. This cognitive dissonance lives in the fact that Black people are both American and Black, but because of external elements like race relations, economic status, and the denial of civil rights, the two are not compatible. Black people, those born in America and have citizenship, have not had access to the same rights and privileges as White Americans.

Writers of the Declaration of Independence penned "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[8] However, the aspiration to obtain life, liberty, and happiness by Black people has historically been met with overt and covert opposition from institutions such as slavery, Jim Crow, segregation, mass incarceration, redlining, voter suppression, and educational inequity. The progress that Black people have seen can be attributed to the way, through religion and community,

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[6] Ibram X. Kendi, "Progress," in *The 1619 Project*, ed. Nikole Hanna-Jones et al. (New York, NY: Random House, 2021), 439.

[7] Kendi, "Progress," 440.

[8] Thomas Jefferson, et al., "July 4, 1776, Copy of Declaration of Independence," Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/.

they have been able to "reinvent religion to enable themselves to grow, develop, interpret, and reinvent the world in which they were trapped."[9]

A Divided American Society

Race and American Slavery

Race is a human-invented shorthand term used to describe and categorize people into various social groups based on characteristics like skin color, physical features, and genetic heredity. It is a social construction introduced in the early twentieth century that "gives or denies benefits and privileges."[10] American society "developed the notion of race [to] justify its new economic system of capitalism, which depended on the institution of forced labor, especially the enslavement of African peoples."[11] American society used race and the "false notion that 'white' people were inherently smarter, more capable, and more human than non-white people" as a means to justify European colonization and subsequent enslavement of people from Africa.[12]

Abolitionists from northern states, the Union, opposed the institution of American slavery and held other varying perspectives from southern Confederate states on issues including economic policies, cultural values, the extent and reach of the Federal

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[9] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "How the Black Church Saved Black America," *The Harvard Gazette*, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/.

[10] National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Historical Foundations of Race," NMAAHC, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race.

[11] National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Historical Foundations of Race," NMAAHC, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race.

[12] National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Historical Foundations of Race," NMAAHC, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race.

government, and its power to permit or restrict the expansion of slavery into western states. Tensions grew between the Union and Confederate states and eventually came to a head during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. Though Lincoln's anti-slavery views were well established, the initial aim of the Civil War was not to abolish slavery but to preserve the United States as a nation.[13] Abolishing slavery only became a goal due to military necessity, growing anti-slavery sentiment in the North, and the self-emancipation of many people who fled enslavement as Union troops swept through the South.[14]

During the Civil War, many enslaved people escaped to northern states for freedom. Others resolved to flee to Canada to escape the U.S. jurisdiction, bringing the Underground Railroad to its peak in the 1850s.[15] Some enslaved Africans who escaped to the North sought to fight in the Union Army against their enslavers; however, some who escaped to slaveholding free territories were returned to their owners if captured due to the Fugitive Slave Act approved by Congress in 1850.[16] Owners of enslaved people had the right to search for escapees within the borders of free states.

The Union also confiscated enslaved Africans deemed as "contraband."[17] Legally, they were no longer enslaved, but they were not free. They could work for the Union

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[13] National Park Service, "Causes," The Civil War, https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/causes.htm.

[14] History, "Slavery in America," History.com, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery.

[15] History, "Slavery in America," History.com, https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery.

[16] James C. Webb, "One of American History's Worst Laws Was Passed 165 Years Ago," *Time Magazine*, https://time.com/4039140/fugitive-slace-act-165/.

[17] Ibram X Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, NY: Bold Type Books, 2017), 216.

Army but for very low wages and live in the horrible conditions of contraband camps.[18] This public health disaster resulted in the death of 1.1 million men, women, and children.[19] Some of the physicians assigned to care for them called them "animals, and blamed their mass deaths on inherent Black debilities, not the extreme inadequacies of sanitation, food, and medical care."[20]

President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, professing to have freed the enslaved held in the Confederate states, but not a single Black slave was actually free to walk away from a master in those states as a result.[21] The Civil War, ending in 1865, was fought first with hundreds of thousands of lives lost; only then were the enslaved set free.[22] If slavery had not ended in the 1800s, the survival of the Confederacy might have meant an evolution into a new world of industrialization.[23] Its enslaved population would have been made to work in coal mines, steel mills, and railroad building since industrial slavery had been employed before secession and became more common during wartime.[24]

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[18] Kendi, *Stamped*, 216.

[19] Kendi, *Stamped*, 216.

[20] Kendi, *Stamped*, 216.

[21] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20.

[22] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20.

[23] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20.

[24] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 20.

Post-Civil War America

The idea of race lived on after slavery ended and fueled tensions between former enslavers, poor Whites, and formerly enslaved African Americans. Plantation owners were suddenly destitute, and state governments, shackled by war debt, were disadvantaged.[25] Without the labor of formerly enslaved people, the southern region's economy collapsed. The production of cotton, without the institution of slavery, was no longer a formal mechanism for maintaining racial hierarchy and preventing the mixing of Whites with a group of people considered inferior and vile.[26]

Black Codes

After slavery ended, a new form of slavery and bondage emerged. The attitudes of most Whites had not changed; some held to the belief that African Americans were born inferior and "… lacked the proper motivation to work, prompting the provisional legislatures to adopt Black Codes."[27] Black Codes in the South regulated the behavior of free Blacks and prohibited them from interracial seating, segregating schools and controlling them through harsh criminal punishments.[28] Black Codes promoted unfair labor contracts between Whites and freed Blacks.[29] With little legal protection for employees or Blacks, the vagrancy laws forced freedmen into unfair employment

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[25] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 17.

[26] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 27.

[27] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 28.

[28] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 28.

[29] Miriam F. Williams and Charles H. Sides, *From Black Codes to Recodification: Removing the Veil from Regulatory Writing* (Amityville, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 265, ProQuest Ebook Central.

contracts; Black children were forced into guardianships to serve as a "cheap source of labor." "Nine Southern states adopted vagrancy laws – which essentially made it a criminal offense not to work and were applied selectively to blacks – and eight of those states enacted convict laws allowing for the hiring-out of county prisoners to plantation owners and private companies."[30] The paradox of being unable to find work and punished for it ensued.

Reconstruction

Following the Civil War, the Union government sought ways to unify the nation by bringing the Confederate states back into the Union after secession. Reconstruction implemented by Congress focused on "bringing the southern states back into full political participation in the Union, guaranteeing rights to the formerly enslaved and defining a new relationship between African Americans and whites."[31] During Reconstruction (1865–1877), formerly enslaved people engaged in the democratic process.[32] The nation experienced a brief period of racial progress with the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted Black men the right to vote; no Black person had ever been allowed to serve in any elected office in the U.S. Congress or most states.[33]

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[30] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 28.

[31] Library of Congress, "The African American Odyssey: The Quest for Full Citizenship," Reconstruction and Its Aftermath, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african-americanodyssey/reconstruction.html#:~:text=The%20Reconstruction%20implemented%20by%20Congress,together%20in%20a%20nonslave%20society.

[32] Nikole Hanna-Jones, *The 1619 Project* (New York, NY: Random House, 2021), 27.

[33] Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 27.

Thirteenth Amendment

In the fall of 1865, a Black newspaper publication, "The New Orleans Tribune," submitted a radical plan for America that called for

> [s]uffrage for Black men, equality before the law, the redistribution of land from the land from the former labor camps to the formerly enslaved, and equal access to schools and transportation. The plan advocated that the Constitution be amended to prohibit states from making any distinction in civil rights and privileges based on race.[34]

Reconstruction brought radical ideals and legislation toward change in efforts to expand human and civil rights for Black Americans. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. A year after the Thirteenth Amendment was passed, Black lobbyists advocated for White lawmakers to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The law "codified Black American citizenship for the first time, prohibiting housing discrimination, and provided all Americans the legal right to buy and inherit property, make and enforce contracts, and seek redress from courts."[35]

Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments

The Fourteenth Amendment was signed and ratified in 1868. This amendment ensured citizenship to Black Americans and all people born (and naturalized) in the United States. Every person born in America and all their progeny gained citizenship. The amendment also guaranteed equal protection under the law.[36] In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment established democracy and citizenship by granting the right to vote to all

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[34] Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 27.

[35] Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 28.

[36] Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 28.

people regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.[37] The Reconstruction Era expanded the Freedmen's Bureau, the agency responsible for assisting the formerly enslaved. The bureau provided food, clothing, fuel, and other assistance to destitute formerly enslaved people.[38] A public education system emerged that mandated Blacks (and poor Whites) to attend school, providing their first opportunity to learn to read and write.[39]

Economic and Educational Progress and Hindrances

Hindrances to Socio-Economic Advancement

Civil rights laws appeared largely symbolic despite economic and political developments during Reconstruction. The Fifteenth Amendment granted and established citizenship for individuals born in America, but absent from the amendment was "language prohibiting the states from imposing educational, residential, or other qualifications for voting, [which led to the imposition of] poll taxes, literacy tests, and other devices to prevent blacks from voting."[40] The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery or involuntary servitude but permitted it as a punishment for crime. Slavery reemerged with a new name through the criminalization of African Americans. Vagrancy laws defining mischief and insulting gestures as crimes were enforced vigorously, and the

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[37] Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 28.

[38] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 29.

[39] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 29.

[40] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 29-30.

enforcement for the punishment of such criminal offenses "opened up an enormous market for convict leasing, in which prisoners were contracted out as laborers to private bidders."[41]

Conditions in the North

Constitutional amendments and civil rights legislation grew out of the need to assist Blacks in the South. Still, racial attitudes in the White North prevented any sustained federal action to protect free Blacks.[42] Eric Foner wrote that northern Blacks were "trapped in urban poverty and confined to inferior housing and menial and unskilled jobs, they were [challenged by] an influx of European immigrants and discrimination by employer or unions, [that left] blacks with no viable strategy for economic progress."[43] Additionally, White northerners feared Black migration to the North and held the thought that freed Blacks should remain in the South to work in cotton fields.[44]

Cotton—King Cotton—was the first mass-consumer commodity.[45] It was one of the world's first luxury commodities, after sugar and tobacco. America needed cotton's

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[41] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 31.

[42] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[43] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[44] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[45] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Why Was Cotton King? The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross," PBS, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/history/why-was-cotton-king/.

export power and fuel for the burgeoning textile industry in the North and the South.[46] The financial system and credit requirements of cotton production changed to sharecropping.[47] Sharecropping was an arrangement for equity participation by the Black farmer; in practice, the Black farmer could be easily defrauded because he had no legal recourse.[48] "Black Americans helped build the economic foundation that has made the United States a global power…but they have also played an unparalleled and uncompensated role."[49]

The Freedmen's Bureau

The Civil War left America divided and established two economic and political systems that "… pushed capitalists and workers further apart, creating winners and losers, the rich and the rest."[50] While many formerly enslaved Black workers were pushed into indentured servitude or imprisoned, northern White elites became the most powerful in the world, "shrugging off the Puritan frugality and modest of their forbears, who had been rich but not spectacularly so and had maintained an egalitarian effect."[51] The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, mainly referred to as the Freedmen's Bureau, was an agency funded by the U.S. Congress. Established on March 3, 1865, the

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[46] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[47] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[48] Eugene R. Dattel, "Cotton in a Global Economy: Mississippi (1800-1860)," Mississippi History Now, https://www.mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/cotton-in-a-global-economy-mississippi-1800-1860.

[49] Hanna-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 475.

[50] Hanna-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 184.

[51] Hanna-Jones, *The 1619 Project*, 184.

bureau's duty was to "establish racial equality before the law," and it provided some semblance of equal opportunity.[52] The agency provided "federally funded social welfare programs to the former rebellious states and their localities primarily to assist and protect the freedmen in their new social status within white America."[53]

The Bureau implemented four programs throughout the reconstructed states: ration distribution, health care, educational programs, and a judicial system.[54] More specifically, the Bureau helped freed people establish schools, purchase land, locate family members, and legalize marriages. The quality of the programs, however, varied from state to state as local agents "developed programs with the dual criteria of availability of funding and need."[55] The responsibility of financing and funding fell on state and local sources because Congress did not directly appropriate funds for operation. "Indirectly, the national government funded the Bureau by transferring army regulars to staff federal, state, and local offices and by appropriating military supplies for local relief efforts."[56] African Americans thus accounted for the building and upkeep of the programs that the government lacked.

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[52] Kendi, *Stamped*, 233.

[53] Ira C. Colby, "The Freedmen's Bureau: From Social Welfare to Segregation," *Phylon (1960)* 46, no. 3 (1985): 219–30, https://doi.org/10.2307/274830.

[54] Colby, *The Freedmen's Bureau,* 225.

[55] Colby, *The Freedmen's Bureau,* 225.

[56] Colby, *The Freedmen's Bureau,* 225.

The Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia

The Freedmen's Bureau opened an office in Washington, D.C., on July 1, 1865, to aid in the transition from slavery to freedom. The District contained only 3,185 enslaved African Americans in 1860, but its freed population increased by an influx of fugitives from neighboring counties in Maryland and Virginia.[57] The African American population increased from 14,316 to 38,663; two-thirds of the population were recent migrants who were unfamiliar with urban life and the workings of an urban economy.[58] "Irregularly employed and dependent for much of the year on public or private charity, many of the newcomers lived in conditions of extreme destitution, inhabiting overcrowded tenements and dilapidated shanties on the fringes of the city."[59] The bureau responded to "unemployment, overcrowding, and poverty" by establishing projects that went "far beyond the normal limits of state power" in nineteenth-century America.[60] Education and economic relief were addressed, along with an extensive program of sanitation and public housing, and a massive project to relocate unemployed workers to other parts of the Union.[61]

Public school education was "essential for the social integration of Black people into the larger society."[62] The Blacks in Washington, D.C., who went to school before the

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[57] Robert Harrison, "Welfare and Employment Policies of the Freedmen's Bureau in the District of Columbia," *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 1 (2006): 75, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27648987.

[58] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 75.

[59] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 76.

[60] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 77.

[61] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 77.

[62] Barbara Boyle Torrey and Clara Myrick Green, *Between Freedom and Equality: The History of an African-American Family in Washington, D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 97.

war, attended private schools run by "benevolent groups" in D.C. The Bureau established 4,230 schools throughout the South, including Washington, D.C.[63] "A quarter-million Black children attended school by 1870 the most prestigious of which was the District's Howard University, named after the director of the Freedmens' Bureau."[64] While there was a push for public education, the construction of schools for the city's Black children was slow, and of the 951 Black school-age children, only one-third were enrolled in school.[65] Additionally, the government did not spend much money on constructing new schools for Black children. They were often moved into old, dilapidated buildings formerly used by White children who moved into new buildings (i.e., The Grant Road School in Tentlytown in 1882).[66] The Black community continued to be underserved in overcrowded schools because it was used by the Broad Branch settlement, and Black children from Tentleytown and Reno.[67]

Officials in D.C.'s Freedmen's Bureau are credited for their important role in transitioning from slavery to freedom in Washington, D.C. The agency actively worked to reform the terrible living conditions of freedmen, alleviate overcrowding, provide relief for thousands of the formerly enslaved, help others find employment, promote Black schools, and defend the rights of African Americans at a time when they lacked political influence.[68] Due to limited financial resources, restricted legal authority, and the

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[63] Torrey and Green, *Between Freedom and Equality*, 97.

[64] Torrey and Green, *Between Freedom and Equality*, 97.

[65] Torrey and Green, *Between Freedom and Equality*, 97.

[66] Torrey and Green, *Between Freedom and Equality*, 99.

[67] Torrey and Green, *Between Freedom and Equality*, 99.

[68] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 110.

short life span of the Bureau, the organization did not completely eradicate hardships faced by African Americans.[69]

Backlash

The decline in the fleeting success of the Reconstruction Era and the Freedmen's Bureau was "swift and severe."[70] "As African Americans obtained political power and began the long march toward greater social and economic equality, whites reacted with panic and outrage."[71] Southern conservatives sought to end the Freedmen's Bureau and all the political instrumentalities designed to secure Negro supremacy. The Ku Klux Klan resurged to stop Reconstruction governments and local leaders through bombings, lynchings, and mob violence. Pressure from terrorist groups resulted in the federal government neglecting to enforce civil rights legislation and removing funding from the Bureau, eventually leaving the agency "virtually defunct."[72]

Education and Economics

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that "The greatest success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negros, and the idea of free elementary education among all classes in the South."[73] The Freedmen's Bureau "rented buildings for schoolrooms, provided books and transportation for teachers, superintended the schools,

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[69] Harrison, "Welfare and Employment," 110.

[70] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 30.

[71] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 30.

[72] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 32.

[73] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 20.

and offered military protection for students and teachers against the opponents of Black literacy."[74] During this time, institutions of higher education such as Fisk, Atlanta (now Clark Atlanta University), Howard, and Hampton were founded. For Du Bois, education was the primary method to lift the Black community from its social, political, and economic oppression.[75] He believed that "education for Black Americans must be deeply tied to society's dominant political and economic forces."[76]

Du Bois viewed higher education as the foundation of the American educational system. Higher education allowed Black social, political, and economic uplift. He looked to Black institutions to "produce broadly educated Black citizens who, in service to their communities, would work to alleviate the current injustices facing Black Americans."[77] Additionally, Du Bois penned that the economic future of Blacks, to overcome a flawed financial system, an unjust administration of the laws, and enforced ignorance, depended on schools, justice, and the right to vote.[78]

In his "Seven Critiques of Negro Education," Du Bois addresses the condition of education for African Americans and provides a recourse to ascending out of the lower caste. "To the American Negro, culture must adjust itself to a different family history and apply itself to a new system of social caste, and in this adjustment comes [a] new

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[74] Ronald Butchart, "Freedmen's Education during Reconstruction," New Georgia Encyclopedia, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/freedmens-education-during-reconstruction/.

[75] Lauren A. Wendling, "Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift: The Educational Philosophy of W.E.B. Du Bois," *The Journal of Negro Education* 87, no. 3 (2018): 288, https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.87.3.0285.

[76] Wendling, *Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift*, 288.

[77] Wendling, *Higher Education as a Means of Communal Uplift*, 289.

[78] W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Economic Future of the Negro," *Publications of the American Economic Association* 7, no. 1 (1906): 219–42, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2999974.

opportunity of making education and progress possible and not antagonistic."[79] On economic planning:

> This new economic planning is only for us if we do it. Unless the American Negro today, led by trained university men of broad vision, sits down to work out by economics and mathematics, by physics and chemistry, by history and sociology, exactly how and where he is to earn a living, and how he is to establish a reasonable life in the United States or elsewhere, unless this is done the university has missed its field and function, and the American Negro is doomed to be a suppressed and inferior caste in the United States for a valuable time.[80]

Booker T. Washington, an African American educator and author, opposed Du Bois' ideas on education. Washington "urged blacks to focus on improving themselves rather than on challenging racial discrimination."[81] In his 1895 "Atlanta Exposition Address," Washington stressed accommodation rather than resistance to the segregated system under which African Americans lived, renounced agitation and protest tactics, and urged Blacks to cast down their buckets and consider working in "agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, domestic service, and in the professions."[82] Du Bois agreed with Washington and "praised and embraced" his phasis on "thrift, patience, and industrial training for the masses, but he opposed Washington's public acceptance of segregation,

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[79] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Seven Critiques of Negro Education, 1908-1938, 1940: W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312)* (Atlanta, GA: University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries, 1940), 93.

[80] Du Bois, *Seven Critiques,* 94.

[81] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 210.

[82] Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address (1895)," in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana Philosophy*, eds. Fred Lee Hord, Mzee Lasana Okpara, and Jonathan Scott Lee (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 343-346, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hd18x6.37.

disenfranchisement, and legalized discrimination."[83] They disagreed "regarding the efficacy of liberal arts education versus industrial education.[84]

Black Spirituality and Community Post-Reconstruction

The period of Reconstruction is marked from 1863, when the North freed the enslaved, to 1877, when it abandoned them and withdrew federal troops from the South.[85] As many states were ending Reconstruction at different times, a new system of oppression arose. Attitudes about the progression of African Americans and the condition of American society led state lawmakers to devise laws that would "regulate every aspect of black people's lives, solidify the caste system, and prohibit even the most casual incidental contact between the races."[86] These laws came to be known as Jim Crow Laws. Jim Crow Laws enforced legalized segregation of races.

A great support to freed Blacks was the growing number of Black churches.[87] Churches were the only place they could go where they could express their sorrow and joy, and unwavering hope in a God greater than themselves and their oppressors.[88] The Black Church was of "critical importance" to urban Blacks in the South and elsewhere after Reconstruction, being a "refuge, a spiritual haven and oasis, a place of education

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[83] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 211.

[84] Arvarh E. Strickland and Robert E. Weems, *The African American Experience: An Historiographical and Bibliographical Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 93, https://thedtl.on.worldcat.org/oclc/61364849.

[85] Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*, 35.

[86] Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), 48.

[87] Diana L. Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 104.

[88] Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, 104.

and inspiration, a source of hope and a site of dignity for many."[89] Blacks made the best of the situation despite segregation, racism, and socio-economic oppression. "They turned to each other and their neighbors and began to embroider the simple functions of life with a style and tempo that suited their taste and nourished their hope."[90]

Dr. Frederick Ware notes, "Among African Americans, community has meant black solidarity, a kind of racial solidarity or black unity."[91] Blacks were collectively creating a new Black American culture that allowed them to survive with sanity in a hostile environment.[92] Black spirituality and churches varied in customs from one congregation to another. Still, they collectively "carved out a distinctive style of biblical interpretation" that focused on preparing for Heaven like White people but also emphasized that a better day would come on earth.[93] This context of Black spirituality eventually gave birth to African American Theology. African American Theology "shows that racism, among other forms of injustice, complicates the human predicament, and its eradication requires nothing less than an enlargement of salvation to include the liberation of persons who lack full participation in society."[94]

Like Hebrew prophets, Du Bois spoke against Eurocentric and American socio-political and socioeconomic powers because he saw that "they were not inclusive to all

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[89] Hayes, *Forged in the Fiery Furnace*, 104.

[90] Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 20.

[91] Frederick L. Ware, *African American Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 159.

[92] Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For*, 20.

[93] Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For*, 24.

[94] Ware, *African American Theology,* 9.

people irrespective of racial heritage," which was a "direct contradiction" to American democratic values.[95] Dr. Joseph Evans, a Du Boisian scholar, wrote: "For Du Bois, the function of the prophetic tradition is its concern with contemporary social systems; those who employ the prophetic tradition become advocates on behalf of people who are enduring particular injustices within those social systems."[96]

Conclusion

The history of Africans in America is complete with many periods of oppression, disenfranchisement, systemic racism, and pure hatred at the costs of capitalism fueled by greed. Regulated by racial caste systems, African Americans have struggled, since chattel enslavement in America in 1619, to obtain economic stability. However, they have been the conduit through which many White Americans and the country have brought their wealth and prosperity primarily through the harvesting and production of cotton. The truth or misperceptions of Black life did not matter as long as "people accepted them and gained a sense of order and means of justification for the cruelties to which they had grown accustomed, inequalities they took to be laws of nature."[97] White life, the liberty to segregate and oppress, and the pursuit of happiness stemming from economic wealth and status have been the origins of African American discontent.

The lawmakers and the holders of power and influence have then curated the history of America. The Constitution, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments,

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[95] Joseph Evans, *Lifting the Veil Over Eurocentrism: The Du Boisian Hermeneutic of Double Consciousness* (Trenton, NY: Africa World Press, 2014), 7.

[96] Evans, *Lifting the Veil Over Eurocentrism*, 7.

[97] Wilkerson, *Caste*, 100.

and other civil rights laws provided some recourse to African Americans, but at the cost of many Black lives lost in the fight for their freedom. Loopholes in legislation gave way to the birth of vagrancy laws and Black Codes after faux emancipation that later evolved into convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration. However, the Reconstruction Era provided opportunities for African Americans to obtain an education, economic stability, and political influence as America wrestled with integrating African Americans into social, political, and labor systems. The government-established Freedmen's Bureau further aided in the social welfare of African Americans, giving birth to public education, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Freedmen's Hospital, and banks and other institutions seeking to improve the African American socio-economic condition.

The advancements made by African Americans were met with backlash from Whites who feared that their status in the American racial caste was challenged. They responded through violent physical and legislative attacks on local and national entities assisting Blacks in their pursuit of life, liberty, and equality. In the fifty years of this historical focus, every attempt to hold African Americans in a lower caste has been counter-addressed with Black resistance, physically and legislatively. W.E.B. Du Bois contended with Booker T. Washington on progress, with valid points addressing community, education, vocation, and economics.

There is merit in Du Bois' belief that racial progress will come from political action, education, and the passing on of wealth from parent to progeny, not just a fraction of the race, but everyone. Washington's argument that an education in the trades, agriculture, industry, technology, and racial solidarity will aid in elevating the status of

the African American race holds weight as well. The country has, since Reconstruction and Jim Crow years, witnessed the election of an African American president and the accumulation of wealth, class, and influence of others, but this must not overshadow the racial discrimination and oppression that persists in our communities today. African Americans are still incarcerated at higher rates than Whites, are behind in local and national literacy rates, and are on the lower end of the wage disparity in America.

As a prophetic activist, relationships with the Black Church and the local community can converge at the intersection of faith and works. African Americans have long believed in Heaven as a relief to oppression on Earth, but also, more firmly, they believed in a salvation that they could see and partake in here on Earth. Bringing to life the things that are not seen will take the further merging of the spiritual uplift and faith from the church with the working and educating of the masses in the community. Carter G. Woodson penned in *The Mis-Education of the Negro:* "If the Negroes of this country are to escape starvation and rise out of poverty, they must change their way of thinking and living."[98] Local and national political action must occur. Still, we also, like Woodson, further suggest the need to employ a revised vision, plan, and guidance to maintain achievements and cultivate sustainable growth.

Understanding the national and local history of racial progress will provide insight on how to contribute to the work of academic achievement and socio-economic development in Washington, D.C. This history provides a foundation and launch pad that will establish a project that is culturally relevant, timely, and effective in transforming

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[98] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Treasures Publication, 2010), 89.

communities furthest from opportunities through equipping young men ages eighteen to twenty-four with indispensable personal, life, and career skills. To do so would require a "justice imagination" that would invite the community to develop a faith and work ethos that addresses our socioeconomic, political, and collective lives.[99] Practicing a justice imagination involves "making and demanding peace" and allowing a communal response from mental health professionals, chaplains, neighborhood residents, social workers, and teachers, which will lead the change.

[99] Gabby Cudjoe-Wilkes and Andrew Wilkes, *Psalms for Black Lives* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2022), 41.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter describes the theology that influences the project toward addressing the intrinsic and extrinsic hindrances African American males in Washington, D.C., face in pursuing post-secondary education and career development. The theological framework for this project will profess the need for prophetic activism and theology, or "language about God," to be used to address systemic racism and economic disparities in marginalized African American communities. The central tenets of Black Theology, Black Liberation Theology (BLT), and justice work in the community will be explored in this chapter, and it will conclude with why they are all best suited to provide a theological foundation for the project.

Black Theology, or African American Theology in this chapter, refers to a study and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices held by African Americans. It is specific to the plight and prosperity of the descendants of enslaved African people in America and centralizes Christianity and American culture. African American Theology "shows that racism, among other forms of injustice, complicates the human predicament, and its eradication requires nothing less than an enlargement of salvation to include the

liberation of persons who lack full participation in society."[1] Black Theology is further defined as a "20th century North American theological movement" that "interprets scripture and the Christian gospel from the context of the oppression of black people engaged in the struggle for spiritual, social, economic, and political liberation."[2]

James Cone, founder of and advocate for Black Theology, penned that Black Theology is a theology of and for Black people. The task of Black Theology is to "analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism."[3] It is also revolutionary in essence. Revolution is not just a change of heart, but it "aims at the substitution of a new system for one adjudged to be corrupt, rather than corrective adjustments within the existing system."[4]

This chapter will also briefly explore womanist perspectives. A primary focus for womanists is liberation from all forms of oppression.[5] Womanist voices are powered by Black women who challenge societal and cultural sexism and racism and are against sociopolitical structures that work oppression.[6] Moreover, womanist theologians link their work and movement to the struggles of other persons and groups seeking liberation

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[1] Frederick Ware, *African American Theology: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 3.

[2] Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 31.

[3] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll: New NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 117.

[4] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 136.

[5] McKim, *Theological Terms,* 196.

[6] McKim, *Theological Terms,* 304.

and fulfillment (i.e., Black men).[7] Finally, womanist theology shall be considered due to its nature of appreciating the insights and contributions of African American women in theological studies, as well as its resistance to classism, homophobia, and human destruction of the environment.[8]

Writer Alice Walker first introduced womanism in her 1981 writing "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" after discovering the limitations of feminism. She sought to integrate human liberation and relate the issues and ideas identified by White women to the lived experiences of Black women, individuals who are historically instrumental in Black resistance to oppression and erasure, and leaders in fostering communal radical inclusion.[9]

In Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community, Katie Cannon penned:

> Womanism requires that…we recount in a logical manner the historical consequences of what precedes us. We investigate contestable issues according to the official records, which seldom offer any indication of why things have gone wrong or why benefactors of oppression strive to maintain certain principles, values, and taboos as the center of social reality. In other words, womanist religious scholars insist that individuals look back at race, sex, and class constructions before it is too late and put forth critical analysis in such a way that the errors of the past will not be repeated.[10]

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[7] Ware, *African American Theology*, 68.

[8] Ware, *African American Theology*, 68.

[9] Katie G. Cannon, *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 3.

[10] Cannon, *Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*, 3.

Theological Themes

The Need for Black Theology

The Black Church and Black religious life have long been pillars of support and hope for Black people. The Black Church and its leaders have been significant contributors to the progression of the race and the attainment of civil rights. However, the rise of the Black Lives Matter times and the present American climate have raised the question of where the Church is. Dr. Valarie Miles-Tribble offers that there is a shared dilemma and frustration between clergy and community leaders about "effective public justice roles for religious communities and societies."[11] The work of clergy and community leaders is inextricably bound as community leaders are confronted by disparities in how justice operates.[12] How we respond to these urgent needs, to serve as public witnesses, depends on how much our faith and theological understanding inform our justice values and ethical actions.[13]

In Change Agent Church in Black Lives Matter Times, Dr. Valerie Miles-Tribbles offers that the church and religious leaders are called to respond to the crisis of injustice as change agents in the community. Religious leaders should use a theological and ethical lens, or theoethics, which links faith ethos to justice components.[14] The faith ethic will call leaders to recognize systemic disparities as a moral crisis. Religious, political, and

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[11] Valerie A. Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times: Urgency for Action* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020), 3.

[12] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 3.

[13] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 1.

[14] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 4.

ideological values have entangled historical roots of polarized conflict whenever the special-interest agendas of society's power identities conflict with other marginalized claims to the rights and dignity of personhood.[15]

Justice work in the community must begin with a robust theological understanding of God's relationship with individuals most vulnerable to oppression. As it relates to the systemic oppression of Black people, this must start with rejecting Euro-American definitions of theology and accepting theology associated with the human existence of Black people. "This theology must emerge consciously from an investigation of the socioreligious experience of black people, as that experience is reflected in black stories of God's dealings with black people in the struggle for freedom."[16] This theology must be rooted in the Black cultural experience, scripture, and Jesus Christ, all of which are sources of Black Theology.

The Black experience, scripture, and Jesus Christ validate the acceptance of Black people's relatability and relationship to God. For Black people, the transcendent reality is none other than Jesus Christ, of whom scripture speaks:[17]

> For it was Scripture that enabled slaves to affirm a view of God that differed radically from that of the slave masters. The slave masters' intention was to present a "Jesus" who would make the slaves obedient and docile. Jesus was supposed to make black people better slaves, that is, faithful servants of white masters. But many blacks rejected that view of Jesus not only because it contradicted their African heritage but because it contradicted the witness of Scripture.[18]

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[15] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 4.

[16] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 16.

[17] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 31.

[18] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 31.

The rejection of the slave master's perception of Jesus Christ justifies Richard Allen's rejection of segregated worship in the St. George Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794, held anti-slavery beliefs because of his theology, which revolved around two fundamental beliefs: Christian moralism and Liberation Theology.[19] In a 1794 statement on American bondage, Allen reminded slaveholders that God struck down unrepentant Egyptian slaveholders in the story of Exodus and that the Lord would "wreak divine vengeance on recalcitrant American masters."[20]

Richard Allen believed scripture established a moral foundation for Black freedom and citizenship in America. Once freed from bondage—and the stigma of slavery—African Americans would redeem both themselves and the nation by emphasizing the equality of the races.[21] Allen's liberation theology offered not merely a warning to American slaveholders but hope: by embracing true Christianity and liberating bond people, they could avert the terrible fate awaiting all sinners. But that fate would indeed come to those who ignored God's sympathy with oppressed people.[22]

James Cone suggests that the Black experience is a source of the Truth of scripture, and Jesus Christ is the Truth and "stands in judgment over all statements about truth."[23] There is no truth in Jesus Christ independent of the oppressed of the land—their

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[19] Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2008), 9.

[20] Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 9.

[21] Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 10.

[22] Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 10.

[23] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 33.

history and culture. In America, the oppressed are the people of color—black, yellow, red, and brown.[24] The struggle of the oppressed for freedom is Jesus' struggle, and he is thus revealed in the particularity of their cultural history—their hopes and dreams of freedom.[25] Jesus Christ then is thus not a theory but an event of liberation, a happening in the lives of oppressed people struggling for political freedom.[26]

The theoethics of clergy and community leaders must be influenced by the theological belief to know Jesus is to encounter him in the history of the weak and the helpless. It is only possible to interpret the scripture correctly and thus understand Jesus' right if the interpretation is done in the light of the consciousness of the oppressed in their struggle for liberation.[27] Therefore, where human beings struggle for freedom and refuse to be defined by unauthorized earthly (White) authorities, Jesus Christ is present among them. His presence is the sustaining and liberating event in the lives of the oppressed that makes possible the continued struggle for freedom.[28]

Howard Thurman asserts the theological claim that God is on the side of the oppressed in that Jesus was a poor Jew who was a member of a minority group amid a larger dominant and controlling group.[29] The economic predicament with which he was identified at birth placed him initially with the great mass of men on the earth. The masses of the people were poor, and in his poverty, he was more truly the Son of Man

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[24] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 33.

[25] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 34.

[26] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 34.

[27] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 34.

[28] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 34.

[29] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 18.

than he would have been if the incident of family or birth had made him a wealthy son of Israel.[30]

In Jesus and the Disinherited, Howard Thurman writes to address the significance of Jesus' religion to people who stand with their backs against the wall. In addition to highlighting Jesus' situation as a poor Jew living in occupied territory with no civil protections, a non-citizen living under a violent and oppressive regime, Thurman offers that Jesus' life, ministry, and death happened as one with his back against the wall.[31] Thurman argued that people who live in such predicaments are pursued by "the three hounds of hell:" fear, deception, and hatred.[32]

Jesus was subjected to the same temptations as every dispossessed person, but pursued a path distinct from the perils of adopting fear, deception, or hatred as a means of survival.[33] According to Thurman, Jesus began with the simple idea that "every man is potentially every other man's neighbor," and that "neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative. A man must love his neighbor directly, clearly, permitting no barriers between."[34] Thurman's words resonate, considering the current climate of:

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[30] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 17.

[31] Christian Collins Winn, "Jesus and the Disinherited: Howard Thurman Still Speaks to the Church," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/jesus-and-disinherited.html.

[32] Christian Collins Winn, "Jesus and the Disinherited: Howard Thurman Still Speaks to the Church," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/jesus-and-disinherited.html.

[33] Christian Collins Winn, "Jesus and the Disinherited: Howard Thurman Still Speaks to the Church," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/jesus-and-disinherited.html.

[34] Christian Collins Winn, "Jesus and the Disinherited: Howard Thurman Still Speaks to the Church," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/jesus-and-disinherited.html.

> Living in a day when police routinely abuse authority, when racial disparity distorts human identity, when it is accepted to discriminate against migrant children and deny individuals the right to legally seek asylum; in which current taxing and spending policies favor the rich and powerful, balloon the debt, and have produced the widest gap between the rich and the poor in over 100 years; in which the highest office of the land consistently expresses a profound ambivalence regarding the common humanity of all peoples; a time in which an ecological catastrophe is upon us and a pandemic surrounds us.[35]

Black Liberation Theology

Christian Theology is a theology of liberation.[36] It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the Gospel, which is Jesus Christ.[37] The single reason for the existence of Liberation Theology is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner yearning for liberation is not only consistent with the Gospel but is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There can be no Christian Theology that is not identified unreservedly with those who are humiliated and abused.[38] In fact, theology ceases to be a theology of the Gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed. It is impossible to speak of the God of Israelite history, the God revealed in Jesus Christ, without recognizing that God is the God of and for those who labor and are overladen.[39]

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[35] Christian Collins Winn, "Jesus and the Disinherited: Howard Thurman Still Speaks to the Church," *Christianity Today*, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/june-web-only/jesus-and-disinherited.html.

[36] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 1.

[37] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

[38] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

[39] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, considered the founder of Liberation Theology, "black theology in the United States has drawn fruitfully on the liberating and religious perspectives that find expression in black music."[40] Gutiérrez understood the theological task of liberation theologies as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in light of the Word of God."[41] Dwight N. Hopkins offers that Black Liberation Theology believes that the God of freedom has made African Americans free—to reach their full humanity without obstacles blocking the goal of becoming human beings who can freely do God's will.[42] Through Christ's liberation message and presence, God has provided a way for the church to move toward that freedom. Similarly, the Trinity is at work in that God today offers a divine Spirit to enable and sustain Black people on their journey toward a liberated humanity. Theology serves as a critical conscience of the church's vocation to liberate the poor in their journey with God to all humanity.[43] Black Theology, therefore, is an effort of African American people to claim their blackness and their freedom as people of God.

Freedom comes when Black poor folk, led by the African American Church, live out their freedom because God helps them in their daily struggle against personal pain and collective oppression.[44] Black Liberation Theology requires doing. Hopkins writes that the Christian part of Black Theology affirms that it is God's will for the oppressed to

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[40] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), xxxi.

[41] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, xxxi.

[42] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 4.

[43] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation,* 5.

[44] Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation,* 5.

be free of racism and become fully created people of God. A Black Theology of Liberation works to keep the church and the community accountable to that claim.

A systematic theological approach views liberation as God's work and intention in the world; God's liberation is permanent, final, and ultimate.[45] God's will is irresistible and cannot be thwarted. Considering God's liberation of the Israelites under the leadership of Moses and God's liberation of the oppressed through the death and resurrection of Jesus, liberation is a gift from God to be experienced on earth and not one that awaits the oppressed at the end of their earthly journey. According to Evans, making liberation only a future reality leads to quietism and leaves the forces of dehumanization in the world unchallenged. Making liberation an eschatological event cheapens life and robs each moment of the grace of God.[46]

Evans contends that liberation is multidimensional and encompasses physical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of human existence.[47] Physical liberation refers to the innate desire of all human beings to enjoy freedom of movement and association and the rights of self-determination.[48] The importance placed on physical liberation in African American social thought is proper because Africans in the New World were in bondage physically for four hundred years. There are still neighborhoods in America where Black people are not welcomed and are systemically shut out due to redlining, governmental

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[45] James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2012), 18.

[46] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 19.

[47] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 19.

[48] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 19.

boundary lines, income disparities, and discrimination. With this being the case, there is still more to the liberation struggle than physical condition.

Spiritual liberation or spiritual empowerment is the dimension of the liberation struggle in which African Americans come to understand and reclaim their intrinsic worth as human beings. The political reawakening of African Americans in the 1960s was also a spiritual reawakening.[49]

> Black Christians, along with Black Muslims, began to see the revolutionary potential in genuine faith. Old compensatory ideas of religion being "the opiate of the people" were challenged, and the prophetic strand of black Christianity reemerged. This Pentecostal liberation was never a naive assumption or an easy victory. African American Christians understood themselves to be involved in spiritual warfare "against principalities and powers," both inside and outside the black community.[50]

Spiritual liberation meant freedom from slavery, self-doubt, and flagging confidence; it meant freedom from physical slavery and the slavery of sin.

Cultural liberation refers to freedom from negative self-images, symbols, and stereotypes. People of African descent have historically been victimized by a color system that consistently describes favorable qualities of goodness, purity, honesty, and cleanliness with the word "white" while describing unfavorable qualities of evil, defilement, disreputability, and stain with the word "black."[51] Cultural oppression of people of color stems from the association of blackness with sin.

Western culture has built a system that distorts the view of life of Black people, which is not only symbolic but pragmatic, and adjusting to the distortion means trying to

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[49] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 20.

[50] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 20.

[51] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 20.

see oneself as others see oneself and trying to escape the blackness that is intrinsic to one's being. Evans concludes that part of the meaning of liberation must include a reversal of color symbolism that has afflicted African Americans and people of African descent. It must consist of overturning the long-standing association of blackness and sin and revalorizing one's identity.[52]

Womanist Perspectives on Liberation

Womanist perspectives are considered in this project concerning Black men because of the expansive nature of it to be detailed to the lived experiences, theological and intellectual perspectives of Black women, while also emphasizing the connectedness of the entire community. Womanism applied to Liberation Theology examines the struggles of marginalized people and how those struggles relate to the people's social location.[53] Its primary focus is on political, economic, and systemic liberation from what has oppressed a particular group of people.[54]

Black women academics have been doing intellectual social justice work for several decades. Pedagogies and curricula disclose solutions to problems and offer a range of ideologies and philosophies about the role of education in society and effective means for African Americans to overcome barriers to educational, economic, and

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[52] Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 21.

[53] Sharon Higginbotham, "Course Highlight: Womanist and Liberation Theology," The Pulse at Chatham University, https://www.pulse.chatham.edu/blog-stories/course-highlight-womanist-and-liberation-theology#:~:text=Womanism%20applied%20to%20liberation%20theology.

[54] Sharon Higginbotham, "Course Highlight: Womanist and Liberation Theology," The Pulse at Chatham University, https://www.pulse.chatham.edu/blog-stories/course-highlight-womanist-and-liberation-theology#:~:text=Womanism%20applied%20to%20liberation%20theology.

political access.[55] Stephanie Evans asserts that Black women's writings can provide foundational concepts of diversity, inclusion, oppression, antiracism, privilege, and power to human rights and social justice.[56] Like regenerative medicine, Evans contends, Black women's life writing can be used to restore, repair, and replace failing or unhealthy aspects of society.[57] Those writings combine the past, present, and future tenses to facilitate growth that can be spiritual, individual, communal, social, or political.[58]

Kelly Brown Douglas writes about this growth and liberation in Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God. Douglas writes about a transcendent God not bound by the world. The spiritual and physical, conceptual, and actual liberation of all people begins with this understanding of God as a free being. God is free from all finite, limiting, human-constructed realities. Douglas writes that the awareness of God's transcendent freedom enabled enslaved men and women to know that the God that their enslavers spoke of was not indeed God.[59] The enslaver's God was a White slave master sitting on a throne in Heaven, keeping Black people in their place as chattel. The Black enslaved knew that this was not the God who encountered them in their free African lives. They were confident that this was not the God of the Bible.[60]

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[55] Stephanie Evans, "Letters to Our Daughters: Black Women's Memoirs as Epistles of Human Rights, Healing, and Inner Peace," in *The Black Intellectual Tradition: African American Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021), 102.

[56] Evans, "Letters to Our Daughters," 102.

[57] Evans, "Letters to Our Daughters," 103.

[58] Evans, "Letters to Our Daughters," 103.

[59] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 144.

[60] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 144.

In a 2023 article on Womanist Theology, Lauren W. Reliford highlights Alice Walker's definition of womanism as an examination of the lived experience of Black women subject to oppression that intersects with their race, class, and gender.[61] Womanist Theology locates themes of God's liberation, justice, and freedom in stories of the Bible, but roots that liberation in the self-empowerment of Black women. Womanism uses the stories of women in the Bible, like the story of Hagar, to draw out examples of God's guiding hand for Black women.[62]

Reliford further offers Katie Cannon's perspective that the dominant—White and male—understanding of Christianity suggests that suffering is a choice in a desired norm that proves the depth of one's faith and commitment to following Jesus.[63] However, that ideology is opposed to the reality of Black people in the U.S., who suffer racism, classism, and sexism in the normal state of affairs. For Cannon, she writes that Womanist Theology allows for a more complex, nuanced understanding of suffering that also acknowledges systemic and institutional factors that must be abolished to achieve the liberation of all, not just some.[64]

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[61] Lauren W. Reliford, "The Liberation Theology That Transformed My Understanding of God," Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/liberating-theology-transformed-my-understanding-god.

[62] Lauren W. Reliford, "The Liberation Theology That Transformed My Understanding of God," Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/liberating-theology-transformed-my-understanding-god.

[63] Lauren W. Reliford, "The Liberation Theology That Transformed My Understanding of God," Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/liberating-theology-transformed-my-understanding-god.

[64] Lauren W. Reliford, "The Liberation Theology That Transformed My Understanding of God," Sojourners, https://sojo.net/articles/liberating-theology-transformed-my-understanding-god.

Theology and Justice Work in the Community

As previously mentioned, Dr. Valerie Miles-Tribbles highlights a question debated between clergy and community leaders: Where is the church in the current climate of intense social dissonance, systemic issues, a growing racial divide, and economic disparities? Miles-Tribbles prompts clergy to reflect on revitalizing church roles to work collectively with interfaith community partners toward prophetic justice and social change through public witness. She defines public witness as a faith-informed commitment to take action in solidarity with the marginalized and to help mobilize change.[65] Further, urban churches, in times of crisis, face an increased probability of having to respond to the urgent needs of the community, and they should do so with multiple voices of varying generations and religions, and foraging respectful support from millennial activist leaders in the community.[66]

According to Leah Gunning Francis, theology looks like faith communities responding to challenging community issues in a transformative way. Francis acknowledges the work faith communities do to provide food and clothes to those in need, mission trips to underserved countries, and monetary donations, but asserts that there is yet another element of caring for the oppressed that should not be overlooked: doing justice.[67] Francis posits that to do justice for the oppressed is to correct the injustice that has been done and not only provide balm for hurts. To do justice is to care for the

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[65] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 2.

[66] Miles-Tribble, *Change Agent in the Black Lives Matter Times*, 29.

[67] Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2015), 91.

oppressed, and to stand in solidarity with them is to oppose the injustice thrust upon them.[68]

Justice work in the community is possible because of theology, or God talk that includes the well-being of all people. Building a community of radical inclusion means challenging exclusionary theology and supporting movements that are critical of the theology that churches used to be private social clubs. There must be a call for them to become more involved in the community's life.[69] Yvette Flunder introduces Village Table Theology, or theology with a basis of giving everyone a seat at the central meeting place—welcome theology. This work centers on building a radical Christian community, complete with those who are visibly and invisibly marginalized invited into fellowship inside and outside the church walls.

Theological Issues and Critiques

Black Theology or Black Liberation Theology can be viewed as divisive and partial. Reverend James Ellis, III, raises that the relationship of Jesus' incarnation to one's cultural context is not appropriate and that no group has a monopoly on oppression. Doing so further creates an "us" versus "them" theological contention, with Blacks being "us" and Whites being "them." Ellis argues that non-Black Christians are also oppressed in America, and theologians must give voice to the voiceless and fight for justice for all people regardless of a particular religion, race, or ethnicity. He further contends that Black people's oppressors are not White people but any people who aim to enslave,

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[68] Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 91.

[69] Yvette A. Flunder, *Where The Edge Gathers: Building a Community of Radical Inclusion* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2005), x.

exploit, and oppress.[70] Dr. Frederick Ware agrees that suffering is not unique to African Americans. Still, Black Theology is concerned with the suffering African Americans endure from racism manifested in the history of the United States.[71]

Theodicy is another theological issue related to the project. It concerns the problem of evil and how the existence of a perfectly and infinitely powerful, wise, and good God can be reconciled with the reality of evil in a world that is putatively created and sustained by God.[72] Suffering has raised the question about God's solidarity with the oppressed, God's intentions for human life, and even God's existence.[73] The questions for theologians to wrestle with are then: If God is on the side of the oppressed, why do they continue to suffer? Why are Black men incarcerated at higher rates than others? Why do Black males continue to fare worse than Black women and White Americans in life expectancy, infant health outcomes, age- and cause-specific morbidity and mortality, and access to adequate health care?[74] How should we respond to or confront evil and specifically relate to God in the face of so much evil? Are Black people, or more specifically Black men, in disfavor with God?

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[70] James Ellis, III, "A Critique of Cone's Black Liberation Theology," Day 1 (blog), https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf2002e8f/faith_seeking_understanding_a_critique_of_cones_black_liberation_theology.

[71] Ware, *African American Theology*, 131.

[72] Paul A. Macdonald, *God, Evil, and Redeeming Good, a Thomistic Theodicy* (New York: NY: Routledge, 2023), 1, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781003298847.

[73] Ware, *African American Theology*, 131.

[74] Jermaine M. Bond and Allen A. Herman, "Lagging Life Expectancy for Black Men: A Public Health Imperative," National Library of Medicine, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4984780/.

Theological Relevance of the Subject

Black Theology focuses on God's relationship with African American people. It is relevant because it gives substance and systemic expression to a theological perspective that sees the work of salvation in the broadest of terms and presents the theme of liberation as the central message of the Gospel and the church's essential mission.[75] Womanist Theology is relevant because it acts as a model that can be applied to the liberation and advocacy for the advancement of Black men. Womanism is a critical reflection on Black women's place in the world that God has created and is known for its analysis of religion and society, considering the triple oppression of racism, sexism, and classism that characterizes the experience of Black women.[76] This model serves as a launching pad and framework for investigating the further focus and specific liberation of young Black males.

A justice-centered approach to community activism is the appropriate response to a liberation-focused theology. Black Liberation Theology in orthopraxis will address the systemic and societal issues that affect young adult Black males in urban communities. Practical theologians, clergy, and community leaders must see young Black men as God sees them: free, meaningful, and worthy of receiving the benefits of being fully known by a loving God. Thus, there is a need for prophetic activism: a faith-grounded, liberation-based ministry that addresses contemporary social issues with love and grace.

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[75] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York, NY: University Press, 2014), 19, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10776527.

[76] Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (New York, NY: Fortress Press, 2008), 7.

Conclusion

The academic, vocational, and personal advancement of young adult African American males in Washington, D.C., evokes concern for many parents, caregivers, educators, and others invested in their advancement across the city. External societal factors such as systemic racism, educational inequity, and communal crime, coupled with housing and food insecurity, unemployment, and health disparities, contribute to significant hindrances to their maturation. Such forms of oppression are higher in D.C.'s Wards Six, Seven, and Eight, where people of color predominantly live and have historically been and are currently being affected by policies rooted in structural racism, such as zoning and public and private divestment.[77]

Black and Womanist Theology are foundational to this project because they convey messages of liberation from all forms of oppression, including those mentioned above. Both theologies use scripture, Black experience, and the life and messages of the historical Jesus as a framework to craft the belief that God is on the side of the oppressed and promises to liberate them from injustices. If Jesus expressed and exercised a preferential option for the poor (in spirit and socio-economically) in his teaching and ministry, then his salvific work on the cross to save humanity from sin also covers sinful and oppressive social structures. Thus, God cares and responds to the social dimensions of sin that impact those most vulnerable to marginalization.[78]

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[77] Elizabeth Burton, "D.C.'s Population Growth Has Affected the Racial and Ethnic Composition of Wards 6, 7, and 8," Urban Institute, https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/dcs-population-growth-has-affected-racial-and-ethnic-composition-wards-6-7-and-8.

[78] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 341-342, https://search-ebscohost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=510163.

Both Black and Womanist Theology warrant practical responses; in most cases, the response is to do justice. Since God cares about the community marginalized by society, clergy and community leaders must work in tandem to actualize a beloved community of radical inclusion. The theology that empowers social justice work is foundational to this project because it explains why it is essential to contribute to the socio-economic and personal advancement of young adult African American males—God cares about them. Social justice work employs theoethics to ensure that persons receive their equitable share of societal resources and justified treatment with love and grace.

Liberation theologies and social justice ethos can be effective models for cultivating personal maturation and career advancement for young adult African American males in Washington, D.C. Local churches can partner with public schools and other community organizations to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are not stifled but extended to reach them where they are. This can be actualized by employing a theoethical hermeneutic in local churches and taking that message to school boards, regional and national government officials, and other hoarders of wealth and resources. Prophetic activism demands that faith leaders proclaim good news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed but also do something about oppression. The advancement of young adult males is a social justice issue and can be addressed by those invested in their liberation from all forms of oppression. Black Theology says that God cares about young adult Black males' lives and prosperity and empathizes with their condition. With this belief, faith leaders in Washington, D.C., can do transformative ministry that will have a generational impact.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Community is a key tenet of African American or Black culture and is the impetus for many individuals' success. It is a gateway to better understanding one's own life and the lives of others and creates an essential foundation for people working toward common goals.[1] The interconnectedness of African American communities is how elders educated the youth, how youth learned moral codes, were entertained, preserved history, and cemented as group members.[2] People who live closely together will inevitably learn from one another.

Urban communities that have been broken up due to gentrification, crime, systemic racism, and economic and health disparities struggle to find connectedness in the community, especially those who attend local churches with generational gaps. Little to no positive social engagements in the community result in a negative impact on the

[1] National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Community Building," NMAAHC, https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/community-building.

[2] Leslie C. Edwards, "African American Storytelling: Collective Memory, Creative Resistance, and Personal Transformation," Union Institute and University, http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/african-american-storytelling-collective-memory/docview/305169952/se-2.

community at large and its youth.[3] This chapter engages two theories that investigate and examine a possible cause of the disassociation with urban communities and a possible solution that addresses the vocational and early adulthood disparities faced by eighteen to twenty-four-year-old African American males in Washington, D.C.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) will be used in this chapter to investigate the social and systemic factors that create and sustain the barriers that prevent young African American males from achieving academic and career success. CRT is an ideal discipline for this chapter because it recognizes that racism is not an ancient relic of the past, and the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continues to permeate the social fabric of this nation.[4] Clergy and community activists are influential in establishing programming and ministry efforts to respond to racism and inequality. Still, there must also be consistent efforts to dismantle racism and racial inequality in local and national legislation that continually oppresses communities of color.

This chapter will use Social Learning Theory (SLT) to take a low-level view of how young adult African American males learn in social settings. Social Learning Theory will provide insight into how observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others either helps or hinders young adults from achieving their personal and career goals. Classical and contemporary perspectives from social

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[3] Sandra Feder, "Gentrification Disproportionately Affects Minorities," *Stanford News,* https://news.stanford.edu/2020/12/01/gentrification-disproportionately-affects-minorities/.

[4] Janel George, "A Lesson on Critical Race Theory," American Bar Association, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/.

scientists and behavioralists will be juxtaposed to contribute to a further understanding of the best ways to teach and motivate young adults to move toward a desired goal.

Critical Race Theory and Social Learning Theory are employed in this chapter to provide a theoretical foundation for the project. CRT will address the societal and systemic factors embedded in local and national laws that impact the trajectory of young adult African American males in Wards Six, Seven, and Eight in Washington, D.C. Social Learning Theory will provide insight into how the focus group may respond to surrounding social stimuli and how it impacts their internal decision-making. In the conclusion, I will describe how the theoretical foundation confirms the rationale project.

Interdisciplinary Theory

Washington, D.C., high schools have college and career counselors to guide students through the graduation process and counselors who work to solidify their post-high school plans. However, some students graduate and do not enroll in or attend a post-secondary institution or find employment. For some who forgo college, it usually means lower lifetime earnings—75% less than for those who get a bachelor's degree.[5] Low household income is linked to financial hardship, increased debt, health issues, limited opportunities, and economic inequality.[6] An analysis of Washington, D.C.'s, annual household income across all eight wards will reveal that the wards with the lowest annual

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[5] Collin Binkley, "Why More Americans Are Skipping College," PBS Newshour, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/why-more-americans-are-skipping-college#:~:text=For%20those%20who%20forgo%20college.

[6] Faisal Sarwar, "Low Salary/Income," LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/low-salaryincome-faisal-sarwar/.

household income are the same that African Americans and other people of color predominantly populate.[7]

Critical Race Theory applied to this phenomenon warrants a crucial look at the relationship between students attending schools in D.C.'s most socio-economically challenged neighborhoods and the average educational attainment and household income level. The Literacy Lab in Washington, D.C., is an organization that recognizes the long-term effect illiteracy has on an individual and their community and has focused its efforts on closing early learning gaps in Wards Seven and Eight, the areas that have traditionally had the worst outcomes for children and have some of the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the country.[8]

Racial segregation and discriminatory housing practices have historically kept African Americans out of fully resourced and high-performing schools. CRT recognizes that school funding inequities are exemplified in many racially and socioeconomically isolated districts and the inevitability of those schools being under-resourced and underperforming.[9] The District of Columbia has seemingly responded to the lack of diversity across the public and public charter school systems by introducing an Equitable Access (EA) option at the system level in the standard lottery for public schools. The lottery system allows the D.C. public and public charter schools to prioritize applications

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[7] Victoria Sanchez, "Disparities Across D.C. Wards Fuel Poverty Problems, Report Finds," WJLA, https://wjla.com/news/health/poverty-hunger-washington-dc-anacostia-river-racial-disparities-wealth-divide-hunger-solutions-report-ward-8-safety-black-population-dmv.

[8] The Literacy Lab, "Where We Work," The Literacy Lab, https://theliteracylab.org/where-we-work/.

[9] Janel George, "A Lesson on Critical Race Theory," American Bar Association, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/.

from students who are designated as at-risk to increase socioeconomic diversity at schools with small percentages of at-risk students—schools typically located in Wards One, Four, and Five.[10]

The Equitable Access option for school systems in Washington, D.C., creates opportunities for students to attend the school of their choice, but the system also further perpetuates the narrative that some schools are of better quality than others. Highly sought-after schools offer programs, courses, and extracurricular activities that others do not. The lottery system does not create equity but more segregation:

> And for as much as the lottery is touted as a fair way to assign seats, the reality is that D.C.'s schools remain heavily segregated — in part because of how distance factors into a family's choice on what school to pick, and also the fact that many white students still opt for private schools. In D.C., Wards 2 and 3 — some of the most affluent parts of town — only account for a combined eight percent of public school enrollment. Wards 7 and 8, on the other hand, make up 44 percent of school enrollment.[11]

The EA system inadvertently upholds that the quality of a student's education largely depends on where in the city they attend school. CRT highlights that systems of sorts are inherently racist because they place a community further away from opportunities afforded to others. The problem identified in the context is that African American males aged eighteen to twenty-four are not enrolling in post-secondary institutions or becoming employed after high school. This impediment can, therefore, be linked back to the school system from which they matriculated.

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[10] Chelsea Coffin and Hannah Mason, "The First Year of Equitable Access: An Examination of Common Lottery Outcomes for At-Risk Students," D.C. Policy Center, http://ww.dcpolicycenter.org. https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/first-year-of-equitable-access-dc/.

[11] Martin Austermuhle, "What You Need to Know about the D.C. School Lottery," WAMU 88.5 - American University Radio, https://wamu.org/story/19/03/28/after-five-years-is-d-c-s-school-lottery-working-for-families/.

Social Behavior

Social psychologists believe that human behavior is determined by a person's characteristics and social situation. An individual's personality traits, desires, motivations, and emotions impact social behavior.[12] Our behavior is also influenced by the people we interact with daily—our friends, family, classmates, religious groups, and the people we see on TV or read about and interact with online.[13] From a social learning perspective, the home and family environment are the first teachers of social interaction, providing kids with behaviors and actions to mimic.[14] Development of normative attitudes and behaviors carried into adult intimate relationships can occur via direct imitation and internalization of principles that guide behavior.[15] Social learning theory suggests that individuals adapt and respond to their surrounding stimuli.

Jawanza Kunjufu agrees and offers that children and youth are shaped and influenced by the home and parents, peer groups, television and media, and the Church. The peer group has grown to compete with the home and family because people have always valued the opinions and views of people who look like them and have similar

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[12] Rajiv Jhangiani and Hammond Tarry, "Defining Social Psychology: History and Principles – Principles of Social Psychology," Opentextbc.ca, https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/defining-social-psychology-history-and-principles/.

[13] Rajiv Jhangiani and Hammond Tarry, "Defining Social Psychology: History and Principles – Principles of Social Psychology," Opentextbc.ca, https://opentextbc.ca/socialpsychology/chapter/defining-social-psychology-history-and-principles/.

[14] William Ross, "Social Learning Theory A African American Males Exposed to Violence," *International Journal of Social Science and Business* 2, no. 5 (November 2017), https://www.ijssb.com/images/vol2.no.5/3.pdf.

[15] William Ross, "Social Learning Theory A African American Males Exposed to Violence," *International Journal of Social Science and Business* 2, no. 5 (November 2017), https://www.ijssb.com/images/vol2.no.5/3.pdf.

experiences.[16] The peer group can influence behavior because groups allow us to see ourselves in the eyes of people who do what we do. The groups bestow labels on members, deeming things popular or unpopular, good or bad, approved or disapproved.[17] With proper guidance, a peer group can be a positive, influential force in the lives of youth and young adults.

The self-esteem, a catalyst for decision-making, of youth can also be influenced by racism, capitalism, and sexism.[18] Racism and sexism are forms of insecurity. They are rationalizations that show that differences create superiority. Racism and sexism illustrate only a difference in race and sex; they do not illustrate competency.[19] Europeans have rationalized that because they are different, in the minority of the world population of people without melanin, they are better than people with melanin. Likewise, men with big egos and an obsession with power deem anyone without it inferior. Therefore, European men have created systems called White male supremacy and sexism, rationalizing these levels of insecurity.[20] Thus, an identity of inferiority imposed upon a particular population, coupled with systems that reinforce the ideals, will likely produce unfavorable behavior within that community.

The social behavior of African American boys, including academic performance, must be evaluated holistically and not in isolation, with just an analysis of home and

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[16] Jawanza Kujufu, *Developing Positive Self-Images & Discipline in Black Children*, (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2020), 22, http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6382294.

[17] Kunjufu, *Developing Positive Self-Images,* 22.

[18] Jawanza Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries* (Chicago, IL: African American Images, 2006), 33.

[19] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries,* 33.

[20] Kunjufu, *Developing Strong Black Male Ministries,* 33.

family life. The structural causes of disadvantaged youth—a weak and discriminatory labor market, increased policing and incarceration, a drug economy, the prevalence of violence, and a general lack of resources in the community—must also be considered when researching models for intervention and success.[21]

A 2017 report by Dr. Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington, along with Jessica Rea, revealed that poverty and low socioeconomic status significantly impact the process and underpinning decision-making of youth. The study showed that people living in or near poverty experience a shift in psychological, social, and cultural processes that may hinder their ability to make decisions that are beneficial in the long term.[22] The study defined poverty as a financial situation and its associated characteristics, such as people's inability to meet their needs, low socio-economic status, marginalization, and social exclusion.[23]

The study's findings were placed in categories of decision-making processes: thinking processes, behavioral patterns, navigating life challenges, and appraising the social world.[24] Many of the suboptimal decisions and behaviors associated with low-income groups focus on the present (rather than the future), the actual (rather than the hypothetical), those socially close (rather than those socially distant), and the 'here'

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[21] Freeden Blume Oeur, *Black Boys Apart: Racial Uplift and Respectability in All-Male Public Schools* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 112, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1856353.

[22] Jennifer Sheehy-Skeffington, and Jessica Rea, "The Effects of Low Socioeconomic Status on Decision-Making Processes," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 33, no. 1 (June 2019): 183–188, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.07.043.

[23] Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, "The Effects of Low Socioeconomic Status," 185.

[24] Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, "The Effects of Low Socioeconomic Status," 185.

(rather than places far away).[25] Such shifts lead to choices that are adaptive to the constrained circumstances of low socio-economic status.

The study results applied to the Doctor of Ministry Project context could further explain the academic phenomenon of Washington, D.C.'s Wards Seven and Eight and the academic disparities across the city. Study results further revealed that low socioeconomic status can be linked to lower academic expectations and decisions to choose careers that fulfill the goals of a job and produce financial security rather than enjoyment of work. The quality of school environments in low-income and trauma-infused neighborhoods and the general lack of or disparaged resources affect youth behavior, academic attainment, and career trajectory.

Children from low-socioeconomic status (SES) families are less likely to have experiences that encourage the development of fundamental reading acquisition skills, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language.[26] Children's initial reading competency is correlated with the home literacy environment, number of books owned, and parent distress. However, poor households have less access to learning materials and experiences, including books, computers, stimulating toys, skill-building lessons, or tutors, to create a positive literacy environment.[27] Prospective college students from low-SES backgrounds are less likely to access informational resources about college. Additionally, compared to high-SES counterparts, young adults from low-SES

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[25] Sheehy-Skeffington and Rea, "The Effects of Low Socioeconomic Status," 185.

[26] American Psychological Association, "Education and Socioeconomic Status," American Psychological Association, https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education.

[27] American Psychological Association, "Education and Socioeconomic Status," American Psychological Association, https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education.

backgrounds are at a higher risk of accruing student loan debt burdens that exceed the national average.[28]

Social Influence

Social Learning Theory is a collaborative approach to learning that contrasts with the traditional, top-down teaching model. By maximizing opportunities to interact with others, social learning enables participants to observe and imitate the actions and behaviors of those around them, which is shown to be a much more impactful way to gain new skills.[29] The problem in the ministry context is the lack of and quality of positive and sage participants to observe and imitate the actions and behaviors. The societal and systemic issues that plague urban communities brought to light by Critical Race Theory must be addressed through legislation and by maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts locally and nationally. Diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, is a powerful tool for fostering equal opportunities and a sense of belonging in our educational institutions, workplaces, and communities.[30] This inclusive approach is essential not only for disadvantaged individuals but for every member of our society,

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[28] American Psychological Association, "Education and Socioeconomic Status," American Psychological Association, https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education.

[29] Caroline Lawless, "Applying Social Learning Theory to E-Learning," LearnUpon, https://www.learnupon.com/blog/social-learning-theory/.

[30] Tamecca Rogers, "Empowering Diversity: The Transformative Impact of DEI on Education, Workforce, and Oklahoma's Prosperity," *TulsaKids Magazine*, https://www.tulsakids.com/the-transformative-impact-of-dei-on-education-workforce-and-oklahomas-prosperity/.

ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, can thrive and contribute to collective prosperity.[31]

The local church must intentionally develop and maintain youth and young adult ministries and community outreach to influence their social behaviors significantly. More specifically, Black men of the church must be involved in rearing young men and boys to counter the negative social influences of the home and community. The church must become a place where Black males ages eighteen to twenty-four can develop greatness and have the opportunity to acquire the necessary life skills to be successful in their academic and vocational pursuits. If young Black males do not feel that the church will allow them to be great, they will look elsewhere.[32]

Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu asserts that the needs of adolescents and young men are money, job, economics, felony expungement, fatherhood rights, sexuality, AIDS, and STDs.[33] The first concern, economics, is relevant to this context and project. Dr. Kunjufu writes:

> The American economy has moved from agriculture to manufacturing to information. The economy has changed, but our school system, its curriculum and pedagogy, for African American youth has not changed. What is a Black male to do when he has been miseducated, incorrectly placed in special education, has a high school diploma, and is lower than a sixth-grade reading level? How is he to compete in the information age? Ideally, this problem needs to be corrected first in our school system, and if the school is not doing its job, then the church needs to step in. [34]

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[31] Tamecca Rogers, "Empowering Diversity: The Transformative Impact of DEI on Education, Workforce, and Oklahoma's Prosperity," *TulsaKids Magazine*, https://www.tulsakids.com/the-transformative-impact-of-dei-on-education-workforce-and-oklahomas-prosperity/.

[32] Kunjufu, *Developing Black Male Ministries*, 102.

[33] Kunjufu, *Developing Black Male Ministries*, 102.

[34] Kunjufu, *Developing Black Male Ministries*, 103.

One way the Church can have a social influence on African American males is by developing economic ministries that will address their needs. These ministries can offer mentorships and entrepreneurship training, pool resources together to help one another, teach on real estate and investing, and provide career development. A career development ministry can provide job training, job placement, and overall career development (e.g., resume preparation, interviewing skills, etc.).[35]

In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul writes that Christ gave the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip his people for works of service, so the body of Christ may be built up. Young Black males are a part of the body of Christ and need apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to build them up. For young Black males, the social influence from the church must be practical and tangible to compete with negative societal influences in the community and prophetic in calling to order the equitable distribution of wealth, access, and educational equality.

Dr. Darryl W. Edwards writes about a "Black Child Liberation Theology," a paradigmatic shift from a focus on the traumas of the Black experience to a spotlight on the triumphs.[36] It is the affirmation for the present, real Black liberation that is quantifiable, recalling an ancient conquering history and the founding of human civilization in Africa, highlighting greatness that has always and always will exist around the world, by the grace of God, seen most in the life of Jesus Christ.[37]

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[35] Kunjufu, *Developing Black Male Ministries*, 108.

[36] Daryl Edwards, "Black Child Liberation Theology: A Contemporary Christian Model for Mentoring Black Boys and Girls" (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2020), 98, https://archive.org/details/daryl-westfield-edwards-final-document-2020.

[37] Edwards, "Black Child Liberation Theology," 98.

Critical Race Theory

Racism has been a significant motif in the formation and narrative of the United States. Though a predominantly Protestant nation founded upon freedom and democracy, its racist history is the basis on which many prejudices and discrimination persist. Elaine A. Robinson puts forward that any exploration of race, racism, and race relations in the United States demands a level of analysis that integrates the interlocking factors of politics, economics, religion, and power.[38] Robinson writes that racism is about differentiation and evaluation of superiority and inferiority based largely upon physical characteristics. It is a socially constructed systemic reality and a product of societal power differentials.[39]

Racism is an inescapable reality embedded in corporate entities, educational institutions, governmental policies, ecclesial bodies, and the mass media. Thus, it can be considered a systemic or structural sin that warrants a form of repentance and redemption from society.[40] This provides a rationale for considering Critical Race Theory for this chapter and the Doctor of Ministry project. Advancing the educational, vocational, and economic condition of young Black males in Washington, D.C., must start with an unraveling of the systems and structures that produced such conditions.

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[38] Elaine A. Robinson, *Race and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 1, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=857119.

[39] Robinson, *Race and Theology*, 2.

[40] Robinson, *Race and Theology*, 2.

Historical Barriers to Advancement for African Americans

Historically, education has been an avenue for societal and economic advancement for African Americans. Literacy was a catalyst for freedom and liberation as literacy challenged the legitimacy of scriptures used to justify slavery and undermined the false foundation slavery was built on: the intellectual inferiority and inhumanity of African-descended people.[41] Between 1740 and 1867, anti-literacy laws in the United States prohibited enslaved and sometimes free Black Americans from learning to read or write.[42] The small percentage of enslaved people who became literate did so at the risk of being punished, sold, or killed. Enslaved Black Americans learned to read by attending secret informal schools, secretly learning from White enslavers' children, or finding opportunities when enslavers were away.[43]

After the Civil War, emancipated Black Americans made learning a priority by establishing schools at their own expense and advocating for universal public education. Unfortunately, strides made during Reconstruction were met with extreme White supremacist violence, damage to learning facilities, racism, and, for those who moved to the North, anti-Black laws, policies, and cultural practices that denied them equitable access to schools.[44] African Americans were denied access to public education because it was a threat to White supremacy. However, despite the financial challenges of utter

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[41] Harvard Library, "Education," Harvard University, https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/education#:~:text=Between%201740%20and%201867%2C%20anti.

[42] Harvard Library, "Education," Harvard University, https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/education#:~:text=Between%201740%20and%201867%2C%20anti.

[43] Harvard Library, "Education," Harvard University, https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/education#:~:text=Between%201740%20and%201867%2C%20anti.

[44] Harvard Library, "Education," Harvard University, https://library.harvard.edu/confronting-anti-black-racism/education#:~:text=Between%201740%20and%201867%2C%20anti.

poverty, dilapidated and poorly constructed buildings, long distances, and apprehension about attending school, African Americans sought formal schooling because they recognized that it was inextricably tied to their freedom.[45]

Critical Race theorists argue that there are tracings of White supremacist backlash to the advancement of African Americans embedded in today's economy, educational system, and corporate and blue-collar industries. Despite isolated achievements and even the election of an African American president of the United States, race is still a factor in success in that there are links between race, social class, and poverty.[46] Some researchers rationalize that issues of disparity and disproportionality in educational outcomes, for instance, are consequences solely of socioeconomic status rather than race.[47] However, as Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Tate explained:

> Although both class and gender can and do intersect, as stand-alone variables they do not explain all of the educational achievement differences apparent between Whites and students of color. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that even when we hold constant for class, middle-class African American students do not achieve at the same level as their White counterparts.[48]

Future Implications

In congruence with Ladson-Billings, Dr. Cornel West argues that race matters and that the consideration of race is vital to the future of America. Politically, conservative and liberal political ideas on race are misguided, and both contribute to a

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[45] Dionne Danns and Michelle A. Purdy, "Introduction: Historical Perspectives on African American Education, Civil Rights, and Black Power," *Journal of African American History* 100, no. 4 (2015): 573–585, https://dx.doi.org/10.5323/jafriamerhist.100.4.0573.

[46] Richard H. Milner, IV, "Analyzing Poverty, Learning, and Teaching Through a Critical Race Theory Lens," *Review of Research in Education* 37 (2013): 10-11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24641956.

[47] Milner, "Analyzing Poverty, Learning, and Teaching Through a Critical Race Theory Lens," 11.

[48] Milner, "Analyzing Poverty, Learning, and Teaching Through a Critical Race Theory Lens," 11.

widening wealth and opportunity gap for Black Americans. The liberal notion that more government programs can solve racial problems focuses solely on the economic dimension, and the conservative idea that what is needed is a change in the moral behavior of poor Black urban dwellers highlights immoral actions while ignoring public responsibility for the immoral circumstances that haunt Black Americans.[49]

To address race in America, the country must begin not with the problems of Black people but with the flaws of American society—flaws rooted in historical inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes.[50] A solution that West offers that is relevant to the project context is forming a large-scale public intervention to ensure access to basic social goods—housing, food, health care, education, child care, and jobs.[51] Additionally, local governmental agencies and lawmakers must be intentional to ensure a just and equitable distribution of resources across the city and address neglected public infrastructure, for example subways, streets, school buildings, and housing, that typically impede productivity.[52]

A similar perspective is that America suffers from racial amnesia and the myth of colorblindness—a type of convenient denial that is deeply ingrained in systemic inequity.[53] To overcome this, the country needs leaders in the twenty-first century who work to transform existing oppressive structures to deliver ethical, democratic

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[49] Cornel West, *Race Matter* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), EBSCOhost, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=46199.

[50] West, *Race Matter*, 6.

[51] West, *Race Matter*, 12.

[52] West, *Race Matter*, 12.

[53] Mark S. Giles, "Howard Thurman, Black Spirituality, and Critical Race Theory in Higher Education," *Journal of Negro Education* 79, no. 3 (2010): 363.

opportunities to all constituents and hold fast to the notion of connecting common human conditions that analyze and transcend politics.[54] A social justice-oriented educational leadership will challenge the norms of oppressive systems, while Critical Race Theory challenges the norms and trappings of systemic racism that appear benign or invisible.[55]

Synthesizing Theories

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw elegantly presents a thorough analysis of a longstanding debate on three texts on education, opportunity, and inequality: James S. Colemans' "Equality of Educational Opportunity," Kenneth Clark's Dark Ghetto, and Whitney Young's To Be Equal. Despite highlighting racial disparities in educational inputs and outputs, Coleman's analysis of the factors blocking equality of educational opportunity obscured systemic and institutionalized racial discrimination, isolated educational inequality from White supremacist contexts, legitimized reduced investments in the schooling of poor and minority students, and resulted in victim blaming.[56]

The contrasting side of the debate shows that Kenneth Clark, Whitney Young, and other African Americans used notions of equal educational opportunity to expose the casual importance of systemic discrimination and to highlight educational inequality's inseparability from the broader political and economic context, one wrought with histories and ongoing patterns of White supremacy.[57] To create sustainable educational

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[54] Giles, "Howard Thurman, Black Spirituality, and Critical Race Theory," 363.

[55] Giles, "Howard Thurman, Black Spirituality, and Critical Race Theory," 363.

[56] Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds., *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), https://www.degruyter.com/isbn/9780520972148.276.

[57] Crenshaw, *Seeing Race Again,* 277.

and career pathways for African American youth, racist ideologies that create systemic discrimination must be confronted collectively by local churches, local and national governments, community activists, and all stakeholders invested in their prosperity. Race undeniably matters in consideration of present socioeconomic status and life outcomes.

Eradicating systemic racism and discrimination can also be fought on another front with the participation of local church ministries and community organizations. Social Learning Theory purports that youth learn behaviors and develop cognitively and socially through imitation, modeling, and vicarious reinforcement. Albert Bandura suggested that people also learn by observing the behaviors of others.[58] While systemic racism and discrimination are addressed legislatively, community activists, school leaders, clergy, and laypersons can work in tandem to adequately prepare African American males for the future.

The education system and socialization process devised by this dominant culture have proven to be dysfunctional and genocidal to the African American community.[59] Some communities rely on the African rites of passage process to instill a strong, positive sense of self and achievement in African American youth, thus returning a sense of empowerment in African American families and communities:[60]

> Rites of passage programs have much in common with independent African American schools because they also address needs that are not met by the traditional, secular, Eurocentric system of education that has produced most of the

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[58] Geoffrey Shoesmith, "The Social Learning Theory of Gender Development," in *Psychology: A New Complete GCSE Course: For AQA Specification 4180* (Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2015), 55, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cg4mcd.43.

[59] Nsenga Warfield-Coppock, "The Rites of Passage Movement: A Resurgence of African-Centered Practices for Socializing African American Youth," *The Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 4 (1992): 471–82, https://doi.org/10.2307/2295365.

[60] Warfield-Coppock, "The Rites of Passage Movement," 472.

> current theories of learning and development in the United States. However, the African American rites of passage initiative differs from the independent school concept in that it addresses the total person, not just the academic facilities used in the process of acquiring knowledge.[61]

Black Theology presents, too, that race matters in the theory and praxis of religious beliefs, and it affects how humanity views its relationship with God. Black Liberation and Womanist Theology teach the importance of both reading biblical texts through the lens of the oppressed and also of considering their lived experiences. Race cannot be ignored in topics of advancing the condition of African American males, but must rather be considered and at the center of every conversation, legislation, and ministry effort.

Similar Programming

The Leading Men Fellowship is a unique program focusing on educational and career pathways for males aged eighteen to twenty-four. The Fellowship recruits, trains, and places young Black and Brown men in pre-k classrooms to provide evidence-based literacy support. There are programs and initiatives in Washington, D.C., like the Leading Men Fellowship, but none are designed to address African American males' unique experiences; some are no longer in operation. The D.C. Department of Employment Services once operated The Pathways for Young Adults Program (PYAP). This program was designed to assist out-of-school and out-of-work District residents aged eighteen to twenty-four by combining occupational training, life skills development, and work readiness instructions to successfully connect them back to the world of work. The three

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[61] Warfield-Coppock, “The Rites of Passage Movement,” 472.

areas of occupational training included allied health, administrative services, and basic IT/administration.[62]

Similarly, in collaboration with the Office of Youth Programs, the D.C. Department of Employment Services once operated the East of the River Career Pathway Program. This program was designed to provide eighteen to twenty-four-year-old Washington, D.C., residents residing in Wards Seven and Eight with occupational skills training, financial literacy, and work readiness training in information technology, construction, real estate, cryptocurrency, and food service. To be admitted to the program, applicants were required to have a high school diploma or GED equivalent. The web page of this D.C. government-sponsored program has not been updated since 2022, and I was unable to contact someone in the office by phone or email, so this program is presumed to no longer exist.[63]

College Track is a national organization focused on supporting low-income students with limited resources in mapping their college paths. They recruit first-generation college students in their ninth-grade year and provide them with unique programming until they complete undergraduate programs. High school students receive academic learning labs, family engagement programs, leadership training, individualized coaching, and college counseling. College students have access to peer mentorship, coaching and guidance, community-building events, and are connected to campus resources, career readiness, and financial wellness coaching. Alumni programming

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[62] Department of Employment Services, "Pathways for Young Adults Program," Department of Employment Services, https://does.dc.gov/service/pathways-young-adults-0.

[63] Office of Youth Programs, "East of the River: Career Pathway Program," Department of Employment Services, https://does.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/does/page_content/attachments/2023%20OYP-EastRiverCareer.pdf.

includes early career support, volunteer opportunities with the organization, and alumni networking.[64]

College Track operates in Colorado; the Washington, D.C. metro area; Los Angeles, California; New Orleans, Louisiana; and northern California. The D.C. site opened in 2020 on a high school campus. They have since partnered with high schools within the southeast D.C. community at Anacostia High School, Bard High School Early College, Ballou Senior High School, Digital Pioneers Academy, Phelps High School, and Thurgood Marshall Academy. Since its inception, they have served 187 scholars: 95% identified as students of color, 86% are first-generation college students, and 84% are from low-income households. College Track is available to students of all genders, races, and nationalities. D.C. Site Director Latisha Chisholm shared that the gender makeup is about 70% female and 30% male and that more females complete the program than males. They are looking to increase the number of males in the program to 50%.[65]

Another successful program, 100 Black Men of Greater Washington, D.C., is an organization that leads by utilizing diverse talents to create environments where children are motivated to achieve and empower people to become self-sufficient shareholders in the economic and social fabric of their communities.[66] Their flagship program is the Saturday Leadership Academy (SLA), a mentoring program that works with collegiate and young men thirteen to eighteen years old from Washington, D.C., Maryland, and

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[64] College Track, "Southeast D.C.," College Track, https://collegetrack.org/communities/southeastdc/.

[65] College Track, "Southeast D.C.," College Track, https://collegetrack.org/communities/southeastdc/.

[66] 100 Black Men D.C., "Programs - 100 Black Men D.C.," 100 Black Men D.C., https://100blackmendc.org/programs/#mentoring.

Virginia. The SLA focuses on public speaking, presentation skills, leadership development, teamwork, financial literacy, health, and wellness. Focusing on work readiness, 100 Black Men also has a Pathway to Success program, as well as Dollars and $Ense to address and help eradicate financial illiteracy among youth of color. They have served 15,000 mentees and have a 100% high school graduation rate.[67]

Conclusion

This Interdisciplinary Foundation Chapter lays the basis for the project by providing sound theory and a framework for the church to address academic and vocational shortcomings for African American males in Washington, D.C. An organization that is already doing this work is The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship. The Fellowship creates opportunities for young men of color aged eighteen to twenty-four to participate in a year-long, residency-style experience in which they are trained and work as literacy tutors while they receive robust coaching, personal and professional development, and career planning assistance. A problem in this context is that not enough participants complete the program and transition into careers or enroll in post-secondary institutions.

The doctoral project will use Critical Race Theory and Social Learning Theory as lenses to assess the problem and develop an action plan to increase the program's success rate. Success is defined as fulfilling program requirements and evidence of post-program employment or school enrollment verification. The project will elevate and address the

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[67] 100 Black Men D.C., "Programs - 100 Black Men D.C.," 100 Black Men D.C., https://100blackmendc.org/programs/#mentoring.

challenges unique to African American males in Washington, D.C., and seek further to uncover gaps in their high school exit plans. Additionally, familial and communal challenges will be considered, as home and community are known influences on human development and maturation. If we are to cultivate young minds and foster success in African American young men and boys, we must view them as God does, in their fullness and not in part. Faith leaders and community partners must work together to meet their needs and to advocate for a society that is fair and just.

Local young adult ministries and culturally based rites of passage programs will further provide insight into how to engage young men communally and socially to enhance the learning experience. Fraternal organizations have also done well in recruiting, supporting, and developing young males into leaders and providing a structure for current and future stakeholders. The project will combine a prophetic activism framework with mentoring and discipleship to help Black males navigate a culturally biased and discriminatory society to pursue academic and career advancement.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

This doctoral project combines the synergy and context analysis, which revealed a need for educational and career intervention for young adult African American men in Washington, D.C. There are many mentoring and male affinity groups in Washington, D.C., but most only serve males in their early to middle adolescent years. At age eighteen, if males have not successfully transitioned into post-secondary education, careers, or the military, they are most likely left to navigate life after high school with limited to no guidance. Without sufficient guidance, young men struggle to reach their fullest potential. The Literacy Lab's Leading Men Fellowship Program was created to address this problem by employing and training recent high school graduates aged eighteen to twenty-four as literacy tutors while providing them with personal and professional development coaching.

There are a few alumni who have obtained long-term employment or enrolled in a post-secondary institution, yet there are many more who do not. This led to an exploration of how the fellowship prepared the fellows to obtain employment or pursue education upon completing the program. The program did not have a mentorship component; it only included generalized education and career intervention. The context analysis and synergy papers suggested that if the LMF redesigned its program model to

integrate mentoring and small group intervention, program participants would be more prepared for job placement and college acceptance.

This chapter integrates all foundational work completed before conducting the project, and the project results. It will connect the major themes of the foundational research, reinforce the problem statement and hypothesis, and present a synthesis in the summary of learning that includes future implications and suggestions for further study. The Ministry Focus Chapter shows that having a strong pathway from high school to life after high school is a way to prevent a cycle of homelessness, unemployment, participation in crime, and health disparities. It shows how culturally relevant and age-appropriate mentorship and intervention can change a young adult's life trajectory.

The Biblical Foundations Chapter examines Ephesians 4:11-13 and its call for unity within a community of believers. Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus to use Christ's gifts to build up the body of Christ. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have a unique role in equipping God’s people to do his work. Like the church in Ephesus, members within the local church and community must work in their unique roles and collaboratively to ensure young men have a safe passage to adulthood. Pastors and young adult ministry leaders can work with high schools in their community to develop programs to educate and empower males of color through discipleship, mentorship, and educational programming.

The Historical Foundations Chapter examines the history of the pursuit of education as a means to racial progress for African Americans and the overt and systemic opposition present then and now. It examines the contributions made by individuals and organizations toward the socioeconomic, educational, and vocational development of

Black people in America during the Reconstruction Era through the end of World War I. The historical points also focus on ideals of racial progress from W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Education and vocation have historically been how African Americans obtain economic and racial progress. With this model and advocacy for equitable and just legislation, young African American males can have pathways to prosperous futures.

The Theological Foundations Chapter examines Black Liberation Theology with a lens on the plight of African American males. It also examines Black Liberation Theology's relationship to Womanist Theology. Both are specific to the plight and prosperity of the descendants of enslaved African people in America and centralize Christianity and American culture. Additionally, both Black and Womanist Theology warrant practical responses to oppression; in most cases, the response is to do justice. They converge to produce a theology of social justice that explains why it is important to contribute to the socio-economic and personal advancement of young adult African American males; God cares about them. Social justice ensures that persons receive their equitable share of societal resources and are treated with love and grace.

Finally, the Interdisciplinary Foundation Chapter focuses on CRT and SLT. CRT addresses the societal and systemic factors embedded in local and national laws that impact the trajectory of young adult African American males in Wards Six, Seven, and Eight in Washington, D.C. SLT provides insight into how the focus group may respond to surrounding social stimuli and how it impacts their internal decision-making. Community is a key tenet of African American or Black culture and the impetus for many individuals' success. Understanding the interconnectedness of African American

communities and how young adult males respond individually and collectively can reveal a solution to addressing the problem within the context.

The foundational papers reinforce the problem statement and point to possible solutions to the problem within the context. In a political climate that continues to deconstruct key legislation and funding vital to the progression of marginalized communities, clergy, lay persons, and community leaders must collaborate to demonstrate radical resistance. This research and project analysis is a sufficient foundation for strengthening African American males' education and career pathways.

Methodology

The research model used in this project is qualitative. The problem in the context is that participants in the LMF are not adequately prepared to transition into post-secondary education or careers. The program model consists of professional learning opportunities and exposure to educational resources and opportunities, but it lacks mentorship and personalized life planning components. This leads to the hypothesis that if the program is redesigned to integrate mentoring and small group intervention, then program participants will be more prepared for job placement and college acceptance. Just as Paul instructs the church leaders at Ephesus to equip God’s people to do his work and build them up, leaders in the church and community must equip and build up young men. The model of mentoring and personalized small groups provides a relevant intervention that allows young men to have a clear pathway to their futures.

Research Model and Participants

The research model includes African American and Latino men aged eighteen to twenty-four years old. These young adult men have high school diplomas or GED equivalents, but they do not have bachelor's degrees, and they live in Washington, D.C. To recruit participants, I connected with the program coordinator of the DC region, who agreed to mandate that all eleven members of the cohort participate. Due to problems around staffing insecurity and a delay in the transfer of information, I was advised to recruit participants directly through email, phone calls, and text messages. I crafted an email to the participants that included a graphic stating, "I want to hear from you. Help DC LMF alum complete a doctoral project by participating in a focus group" (Appendix A). A follow-up email included a consent form and further explained in detail that the project sought to understand ways to support young men as they transition from high school to college and careers (Appendix B). Five of the eleven original cohort were recruited to participate, and all five completed the project.

The project was designed to include workshops covering various topics, and data was to be collected through pre- and post-program surveys, journal entries, and interviews. The sessions were planned to be held at The Literacy Lab's office space, but due to the financial instability of the program and the availability of space, it was instead held virtually. The eight-week project was designed to be implemented as follows:

- Week One: Project Overview: How did this project come about?
- Week Two: Self Awareness: Who am I? What is important to me?
- Week Three: Planning for the Future: College or Career?
- Week Four: Creating a Post-Fellowship Plan

- Week Five: Interview Skills
- Week Six: Finalizing a Career Plan
- Week Seven: Social Awareness: Who am I in the world?
- Week Eight: Presentation on Project Experience and Key Learnings

Instruments Used for the Research Study

The project was designed to incorporate four instruments that would best capture the information needed to prove or disprove the hypothesis. The pre-survey questionnaire captured participants' experiences transitioning from high school, detailed any support they may have received, assessed their attitudes towards college and careers, and identified interests and intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in academic success (Appendix C).

The post-survey measured the effectiveness of and how the participants responded to the interventions, changes in feelings of preparedness, interest in mentorship, and desirability to pursue post-secondary education or a career placement (Appendix D).

The interviews allowed participants to speak candidly and in greater detail about their personal experiences transitioning from high school, their experience in the fellowship, and any changes they may have experienced during this project (Appendix E).

Weekly journaling was designed to capture responses to daily prompts and record any notes from the workshops.

Anticipated Impact on the Participants

Given the number of participants in the project, the mode of implementation, and the time available, I wanted to make four impressions of the participants. I first anticipated that the hypothesis would be proven in the affirmative and that the participants would feel more prepared to finish the program and transition to a career or post-secondary education. With direct mentorship and personal life planning sessions, I anticipated that the participants would be eager to take the next step toward their future. Secondly, I expected that fellows would develop a sense of community and camaraderie amongst one another. This relationship would be essential in holding one another accountable for achieving shared personal and professional goals. The Biblical Foundations Chapter's theme of unity was thus reflected in this anticipated impact on the participants.

I also anticipated that the participants would acquire a general understanding of workplace professionalism. Many high school students graduate without job experience and have not had career and workplace professionalism coaching. Impact could be measured by participants demonstrating strong interview skills, communication competencies, and understanding of professional and appropriate dress, and time and personal management. A fourth impact anticipated was that participants would express a deeper self-confidence and positive self-image after the project. I projected that having African American men leading the workshops would allow the participants to see themselves in the future through the facilitators. Having an instructor in proximity would allow the participants to see what is possible for their own lives and aid them in increasing their self-efficacy.

Implementation

This section details initial steps, participant information, and the role of the professional and context associates. It includes the project's intended implementation, an obstruction to its implementation, and how the project was done. This section will conclude with information collected from participants according to the regulations of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of United Theological Seminary.

Initial Steps

Upon approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of United Theological Seminary, participants were recruited for the project. Project details were shared with the program's national and regional directors on Thursday, January 23, 2025, and they assisted in identifying the best ways to engage participants. I was directed to recruit participants through email, phone call, or text, and explain what they would be asked to do if they agreed to participate in the study. I did not receive the contact information for the participants until February 24, 2025. At this time, I was informed that I could no longer use the program's space and had to conduct the sessions online. I emailed participants the project flyer and consent form to be returned before the start date of the weekly sessions. Five of the eleven young men in the program replied to the email on various days, thus further delaying the start of the project. The first day of the project was Tuesday, March 4, 2025.

The Participants

The participant demographic comprised young men of diverse ages, ranging from eighteen to twenty-four, and included young men who identify as African American/Black or Latino. All participants are high school graduates; three are currently enrolled in college, one is not enrolled in college, and one has some college experience but does not have a degree. They all reside in Washington, D.C. and have completed at least eight months of the LMF.

Professional and Contextual Associates

The professional associates were made up of four individuals who have Doctor of Ministry degrees in varying specialties. They assisted in developing and revising the questions for the pre- and post-surveys. Professional associates also helped me to think critically as a researcher and challenged me to reconsider the instruments used to measure the data. We met via Zoom and phone calls to discuss how to conduct the project and, later, how to implement the project, considering the structural changes in the organization. The professional associates also served as mentors and spiritual guides for me as I encountered roadblocks in planning and implementation. They prepared me spiritually and academically to conduct an objective study and one that would render the results useful for further study.

The contextual associates aided in crafting the project's structure provided key information on the program's history and offered best practices for engaging with the participants. The LMF's national director, later renamed vice president of Leading Men, provided the research the organization gathered to support the need for such a program.

He provided the history of the program's launch in 2016 and how it has developed over the years. The D.C. region program director provided information on the program's current structure, including information on professional learning groups, attempts to recruit mentors for young men, and the changing structure of the entire organization. The CEO of The Literacy Lab provided the vision for the organization as the LMF became the flagship program of the organization in 2024.

Intended Implementation Plan

The project was planned to be facilitated in person with seven to ten participants. Sessions would ideally be delivered partly in a presentation and conversational format, and participants would demonstrate understanding through short quizzes, games, and journal reflections. Individual interviews would be scheduled before the group sessions to allow for more privacy and opportunities for connection. Participants unable to attend a session in person would have the option to receive session materials to review by themselves or with me. Below is the weekly schedule of how I would have implemented the project if I could have done so.

Week One

15-minutes to welcome participants to the space

15-minutes for project overview: How did this project come about?

30-minutes for ice breakers and a getting-to-know-you activity

15-minute break and refreshments

15-minutes wrap-up and closing journaling exercise

Week Two

15-minute check-in/wellness check

45-minute presentation on Self Awareness with Ray Nelson

10-minute break and refreshments

15-minute independent journaling on self-awareness and sharing

5-minute wrap-up and close

Week Three

15-minute check-in/wellness check

35-minute presentation on Planning for the Future with Ivan Douglas

10-minute break and refreshments

20-minute independent journaling activity and sharing

10-minute wrap-up and close

Week Four

15-minute check-in/wellness check

35-minute presentation on Creating a Post-Fellowship Plan with Kaneshia Green

10-minute break and refreshments

20-minute independent journaling activity and sharing

10-minute wrap-up and close

Week Five

15-minute check-in/wellness check

25-minute presentation on Interview Skills with Torren Cooper

20-minute mock interviews

10-minute break and refreshments

15-minute workshop on building a resume

5-minute wrap-up and close

Week Six

15-minute check-in/wellness check

35-minute presentation on Finalizing a Career Plan with Torren Cooper

10-minute break and refreshments

25-minute independent journaling

5-minute wrap-up and close

Week Seven

15-minute check-in/wellness check

35-minute presentation on Social Awareness with Kwamé MacIntosh

5-minute break and refreshments

30-minute independent journaling activity and individual interviews

5-minute wrap-up and close

Week Eight

15-minute check-in/wellness check

35-minute presentation on Project Experience and Key Learnings with Torren Cooper

10-minute break and refreshments

10-minute journal writing and collection

15-minute post survey

5-minute wrap-up and next steps

Obstruction to Implementation and Revisions

During the initial steps of planning for the project, there was a delay in sharing information from the organization because of an internal restructuring of the program. The DC Region Program Director informed me that they and others would be terminated at the end of the programming year. They did not share why, but they did share that the news of the layoffs was the reason they were hindered from sharing sensitive information. The LMF had become the organization's flagship program, but the future of its continuation throughout the year was unclear. This is why the project's physical space was changed and later made unavailable for use. I was forced to hold the workshops virtually on Zoom without a physical place to meet.

During this same time, the federal government had begun to dismantle and roll back key legislation and financial support established to advance the lives of marginalized communities. The Director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), assisted by the Attorney General and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), was commissioned to execute “the termination of all discriminatory

programs, including illegal DEI and "diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) mandates, policies, programs, preference, and activities in the Federal Government, under whatever name they appear."[1]

Federal government agencies have been instructed to terminate, to the maximum extent by law, any initiatives or programs, "equity-related" grants or contracts, and all DEI or DEIA performance requirements for employees, contractors, or grantees.[2] The Literacy Lab did not plainly state that they are recipients of federal grants and thus were forced to terminate programs. They did, however, share that staff termination and scaling back the program were in the interest of the organization's sustainability and longevity. The LMF, a program partly designed to diversify the teacher pipeline with African American and Latino men, was now being restructured to shift its focus on hiring staff and recruiting fellows who reflect the communities they serve. The LMF is now renamed The Fellowship.

The delay in sharing information concerning location, time, and content approval led to scheduling conflicts with potential participants in the newly announced project format. Additionally, scheduling conflicts arose with potential project speakers, so I conducted the sessions myself. Four participants were available to interview with me, and only one could meet for additional sessions. I conducted the interviews on Tuesday,

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[1] The White House, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing," Whitehouse.gov, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/.

[2] The White House, "Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing," Whitehouse.gov, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/.

March 4, 2025; Wednesday, March 5, 2025; Wednesday, March 12, 2025; and Saturday, March 29, 2025.

Week One: March 6th

The first week served as the project's official initial meeting. During our meeting, I started by giving the pre-survey. I gathered information about the participant's senior year in high school, his current collegiate journey, and why he had to deviate from his plan. We talked through some of the academic and social challenges he faced in college and the decision he and his mom made for him to come back home to Washington, D.C. We also talked about his career interests and what kind of short-term employment he would like to have in the summer until he went away again for college in the fall. We concluded this session by discussing financial aid options and documents for him to complete with his mom.

Week Two: March 21st

The session started with a wellness check-in. We talked about how he felt mentally and emotionally and some things he could do to care for himself. We then reviewed the financial aid options and discussed potential colleges to transfer to that offered his major. I conducted a skills assessment to better understand what skills he possessed and what career track might be the best fit. We ended the session by rehearsing interview tips, reviewing work experiences on his resume, and discussing how he could leverage those experiences in future careers.

Week Three: March 25th

This session started with a wellness check-in. The participant did not hear back from a potential employer after an interview and had not received any additional leads, so I wanted to check in to see how he felt about these events. We talked about perseverance, a growth mindset, and goal setting, all things he would need to possess to navigate adulthood. We ended this session by reviewing the resume I edited and revised for him and identifying additional places he could apply for work.

Week Four: April 3rd

We met again the following week to conclude our sessions. We started by discussing what he had learned from our sessions, setting a goal for summer employment, and returning to school in the fall. He expressed interest in staying in touch to ensure I could keep him accountable for meeting those goals. He completed a formal interview for the project and the post-survey.

Summary of Learning

This section of the project analysis will present data collected from the participants who completed the revised project sessions. It will also include data from a survey given to the four individuals who could not attend the sessions but were willing to meet with me individually. Their data will reflect their experience in the LMF program. Additionally, this section includes summaries of the interviews with all five participants. This information helped me to make a judgment on the hypothesis.

Pre and Post-Survey for Revised Project

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
How prepared did you feel for life after high school?				How prepared do you feel for life after high school after attending this workshop?			
Very prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Not prepared	Very prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Not Prepared

Pre-Survey		Post Survey	
Did you have college or career plan for what you would do after high school?		Do you have a college or career plan for what you will do after this workshop?	
Yes, I have a plan	No, I did not have a plan	Yes, I have a plan	No. I do not have a plan

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
How confident are you in your knowledge of finding college and career information?							
Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not Confident	Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not Confident

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
How has the Leading Men Fellowship Increased your preparedness to go to college?				How has this workshop increased your preparedness to go to college?			
Increased significantly	Increased slightly	No change	Decreased	Increased significantly	Increased slightly	No change	Decreased

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
How prepared are you for future employment opportunities?							
Very prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Not prepared	Very prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Not Prepared

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
Rate your experience in the Leading Men Fellowship				Rate your experience in the workshops			
Very beneficial	Beneficial	Neutral	Not beneficial	Very beneficial	Beneficial	Neutral	Not beneficial

Pre-Survey				Post Survey			
How interested are you in receiving a personal life mentor?				How interested are you in receiving a personal life mentor?			
Very Interested	Interested	Neutral	Not Interested	Very interested	Interested	Neutral	Not Interested

Participants Who Did Not Participate in the Workshops

How would you rate your college and career assistance from the Leading Men Fellowship?			
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
2	2		

How prepared do you feel for life after the Leading Men Fellowship?			
Very prepared	Prepared	Neutral	Not prepared
1	3		

Do you have a plan for what you will do after the Leading Men Fellowship?	
Yes, I have a plan	No, I do not have a plan
4	

How confident are you in your knowledge of finding college and career information?			
Very confident	Confident	Neutral	Not confident
	3	1	

How has the Leading Men Fellowship increased your preparedness for college?			
Increased significantly	Increased slightly	No change	Decreased
2	2		

How has the Leading Men Fellowship increased your preparedness for future employment?			
Increased significantly	Increased slightly	No change	Decreased
1	2	1	

Rate your experience in the Leading Men Fellowship			
Very beneficial	Beneficial	Neutral	Not beneficial
3	1		

How interested are you in receiving a personal life mentor?			
Very interested	Interested	Neutral	Not Interested
	2	2	

Participant Interview Summaries

The participant interview instrument was used to gather specific information about the participants' senior year experiences as they prepared to transition to life after high school. I asked them about college and career support, any challenges they may have faced, and the source of their motivation to graduate. I also focused on what they had planned to do after high school; if there were any diversions from that plan, I asked what they were and why. The interviews helped provide insight into what kind of and how much support African American males may need to navigate life between eighteen and twenty-four years old. Understanding why they chose the LMF also provided insight into what high schools, ministries, and organizations can do before their senior year to help define a clear pathway to post-secondary education or careers. Participant interviews are coded LMF for Leading Men Fellow and are paired with the number order in which the interview was held.

LMF01

This participant shared that one of the major challenges in his senior year was having access to the college and career advisor. He attended a small high school, but the individual responsible for college and career assistance was frequently unavailable due to attending to other responsibilities in the school. He sought more assistance connecting with colleges, but the advisor pointed to outside resources for him to take advantage of independently. After high school, he went to school for business for two years, but he did not finish because his interests changed, and he did not know how to switch majors. The participant decided to come back home and take a gap year to save money to go back to school, so he could get away from a situation at home. Searching for work led him to the LMF; he plans to return to school in the future.

LMF01 shared that he could have used more support in high school but that it wasn't realistic given the high demand for one advisor for his whole grade level. He is now motivated to keep working to prove himself to be successful and wants to influence his circle of friends and younger siblings. He needs to make sure the people he cares about are doing well, so he prioritizes work. He is interested in having a straightforward mentor and someone who will connect with him regularly to model certain things for him and ensure he is on the right track.

LMF02

This participant graduated from high school in 2022. He worked hard in middle school so he could attend a high school outside his neighborhood and take advantage of the opportunities it offered. He shared that he was a student who was not too involved in

anything outside of class. In his senior year, he depended on himself to find college information because no other help was available. He decided not to attend a four-year college immediately but to work part-time while taking classes at a community college.

LMF02 applied for the fellowship because he needed a job and had always wanted to become a teacher, but he did not know how to become one. The fellowship gave him experience working in education and inspired him to get an associate's and a bachelor's degree. He feels his father's work ethic is what motivates him to achieve his goals. After the fellowship, he plans to become a paraprofessional at a D.C. Public School, pending that he passes the certification exam.

LMF03

Participant LMF03 shared that his senior year of high school went by fast, but the school did help him with some college preparation. He did not have assistance outside of school like his peers, so he depended on the school despite having a busy advisor. He knew he wanted to go to college, so he went without a plan and decided to figure it out as he went along. LMF03 is currently in his freshman year and has been influenced by the fellowship to pursue education as a major and a career.

When asked about motivation, he shared that he is motivated by the happiness of fulfilling his passion and his pursuit of success. To be successful throughout college, he would like to create relationships with Black male peers in his community to establish bonds conducive to personal and professional growth. He is interested in being connected to a mentor to continue learning about the profession and someone to help with his

professional development. LMF03 does not have a post-fellowship plan, but he will continue his education and look for more opportunities in education.

LMF04

This participant shared that he experienced a rough patch in his senior year academically. Still, he was able to work through it by finding a group of friends who were also working towards improving their grades. He shared that the school did provide college and career support, but he and others needed more help. LMF04 attributes his collegiate pursuits to the mentoring program he was a member of and to outside organizations that supported them after school. He noted throughout the interview that the mentors made a difference.

LMF04's main goal was to go to college after high school, and he did attend college for two years. His parents motivated him to graduate and continue to build his self-confidence and perseverance. He is home from school due to academic and financial concerns but plans to return in the fall. He shared that he is looking for financial aid support and money to buy books for classes.

LMF05

This participant had an unconventional senior year. They had an abbreviated class schedule that allowed him to focus on sports. He planned to get a full-ride scholarship to play football at a Division I school, but that did not happen. He did go to college for a year and a half after he graduated, but he did not finish. LM05 shared that he was not adequately prepared for college and was caught off guard by things he didn't know. He

wishes he had someone to explain the process and provide guidance through loan and aid applications because he did not understand what he was signing up for.

When he returned home, LMF05 took a gap year and then found the fellowship after fumbling through different plans. He completed the fellowship and was hired as a paraprofessional for four and a half years. He is not in the education field anymore but does work and owns a limited liability company (LLC). LMF05 seeks financial support for his business and can benefit from professional connections, career, and financial mentorship. He does not plan to go back to college. His family motivates him to achieve his goals; he desires to influence his younger family members positively.

Hypothesis and Key Learnings

If the LMF redesigned its program model to integrate mentoring and small group intervention, program participants would be more prepared for job placement and college acceptance. The data from the project indicates that my hypothesis was incorrect. There was no significant difference in the college and career preparedness level between the individuals who completed the mentoring and small group intervention and those who did not. Both groups showed a slight increase in preparedness. The data was mainly influenced by the amount of college and career readiness exposure before joining the Leading Men Fellowship, the programming embedded within the fellowship, and the length of the study. With a longer project implementation window and a second control group that receives no interventions, I believe the hypothesis would be proven in the affirmative.

Participants highlighted that mentoring and the fellowship program positively impacted their planning and preparation for college and employment. Embedded within the program are whole-group professional learning sessions facilitated by program staff that expose fellows to topics including but not limited to financial literacy, self-literacy, and building a professional identity. Though small-group intervention and mentoring are helpful, whole-group exposure proved to be just as effective. Participants mentioned the week-long intensive they attended before the start of their tour as literacy tutors and how impactful it was to learn among their peers and meet other African American and Latino males from different regions. Three participants also mentioned the impact on their lives from the relationships and bonds formed with their cohort and how being around like-minded people makes a difference.

Social Learning Theory is exemplified here as it proposes that learning can happen from watching others behave.[3] Three important tenets of SLT are: (1) individuals can learn through observation, (2) internal mental states play a significant role in the process, and (3) learning does not always result in a behavioral change.[4] Thus, it can be surmised that unpreparedness is not the main reason participants in the LMF, and other young men eighteen to twenty-four, do not transition to college or careers after high school. Some young men will need mentorship and supplemental academic and career

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[3] Arishaba Emilly, "Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools Using Social Learning Theory," *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education* (February 25, 2024): 243, https://doi.org/10.59765/ndfw8253ric.

[4] Arishaba Emilly, "Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools Using Social Learning Theory," *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education* (February 25, 2024): 243, https://doi.org/10.59765/ndfw8253ric.

intervention to prepare them for the transition out of high school, but some already possess sufficient academic and career prowess.

Therefore, barriers to success for African American young men largely remain societal. If they are prepared for the transition to life after high school, there must be resources for them to thrive in adulthood. Further, schools, churches, and community organizations must be willing to be the impetus by which they are connected to the existing resources. Financial resources must be available for them to afford post-secondary education. Employers must be willing to pay a livable wage in a changing economy so they can afford to live comfortably. Young men must have access to affordable health care and resources to avoid health disparities. They must have access to these and other essential resources to maintain the self-efficacy needed to persevere in a society that continues to deem them unworthy of investment.

The project did not work as well as it could have due to the interruptions in planning and implementation. I gathered that the president's executive orders would impact the organization, but I did not anticipate it happening so fast or that the organization would completely eradicate the program it deemed its flagship. The project could work well if implemented in a physical space that is not rented hourly if it were to be conducted with out-of-school-age young adult men not enrolled in college or employed, and if there were an incentive for participation, such as a scholarship, employment, or a monetary stipend.

Conclusion

Empowering males of color is social justice work. It is biblically and ethically sound to ensure that Black and Brown young men receive a fair and equitable distribution of wealth and resources to matriculate through school successfully. It is morally right to adequately prepare them for life after high school so they can thrive in adulthood. The Black church at large and other entities have done well with rites of passage and mentoring programs as they invest in their whole life development and instill wholesome values in them. Still, barriers to success for males of color persist. This project revealed that the problem in the context is not that participants aren't prepared for college and careers but that the pathways to opportunities, like during the Reconstruction Era, continue to be dismantled.

The obtainment of education and garnering vocational skills have long been pathways to racial progress and upward mobility for African Americans. W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington are forerunners in this dilemma, with Washington advocating for self-sufficiency and vocational education and Du Bois advocating for civil rights.[5] Though many have earned economic success, the lens of CRT shows that the United States remains deeply impacted by inequitable education and governmental policies. Without Affirmative Action and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies, Black and Brown populations remain socially and economically marginalized.

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[5] Booker T. Washington, "The Atlanta Exposition Address (1895)," in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Africana Philosophy*, eds. Fred Lee Hord, Mzee Lasana Okpara, and Jonathan Scott Lee (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 343-346, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1hd18x6.37.

Programs across the country at every educational, social, and political level dedicated to the advancement of marginalized communities continue to be challenged to curb their support at the cost of complying with government policies. Entities that choose to do so further communicate their untenable commitment to liberty and justice for all. While society may not project concern for communities on the margin, I offer that clergy and other stakeholders live out a practical Black Theology and demonstrate that God is on the side of the oppressed. This can be done by employing prophetic activism.

Prophetic activism demands faith leaders proclaim the good news to the poor and do something about oppression. The advancement of Black youth is a social justice issue and can be addressed using what Dr. D. Anthony Everett calls compassionate action. Compassion takes the image and spirit of God that connects every human being and moves us to justice. This is love in public – compassion for the well-being of others.[6] Compassion must lead us to dismantle systems of oppression that perpetuate cycles of illiteracy, unemployment, health disparities, gentrification, and mass incarceration. Moreover, ministers must be willing to preach a gospel of liberation that frees humanity of the belief that the relief we seek at the end of life can be actualized here on earth. Black and White clergy, as moral faith leaders, should be urged to challenge their congregants to see that hoarding of wealth and resources is immoral and deplorable and then commission them to do something about it.

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[6] D. Anthony Everett, "Centre for Prophetic Activism," PropheticActivism.org, https://prophetic-activism.org.

Future Implications

Education and mentorship are central to my work as a minister, mentor, and teacher. As a Black man, I have an unrelenting call to ensure that all Black males within my reach have the best chance at a bright future. This is why The Literacy Lab's LMF Washington, D.C., cohort was the perfect context for me to study. Though the nature of the fellowship in its conception no longer exists, the program and others like it can utilize the following key learnings from this project. To enhance efforts to strengthen educational and career pathways for African American young men, interested parties can: (1) cultivate positive communal relationships, (2) implement early intervention programs, and (3) establish support to and through their post-secondary and career pursuits.

A consistent motif in my foundational chapters and project was the importance of community. Friendship and family ties are central to African American life, as it has been a force by which we have been able to survive Reconstruction, Jim Crow, Mass Incarceration, and other social ills. Black Greek letter organizations and religious communities use terms like brother and sister to describe members because of the bonds created in commonality. This should be no different for the young adult men in our community. Young men need positive communal relationships in and outside the home to have the support they need to succeed. Any organization seeking to impact young men would do well first to establish and cultivate relationships with them built on genuine connection and trust.

A second way to strengthen education and career pathways for young African American men is to start intervening before eighteen. College Track, mentioned in the Interdisciplinary Foundations Chapter, is an organization that recruits students in their

freshman year of high school to begin laying the foundation for a pathway to college. They work with students from the spring of their freshman year, providing them with opportunities such as college tours, financial aid workshops, and readiness tips. College Track also requires parental and guardian participation to ensure accountability and that every person possible can make college happen for the student. At eighteen, students may have been involved in alternative activities or have had adverse childhood experiences that may sway their perspective on college. Intervening early can prevent deterrents from stifling potential college access or acquiring core job and life skills.

A third implication of strengthening pathways for young adult men is establishing sufficient support for them to get to and through college. Quite a few young men who have participated in the fellowship have some college experience but no degree. Barriers include financial aid troubles, priority family situations, academic struggles, and simply not having the skills to navigate adulthood independently. Some struggle with simple organizational skills like creating a schedule, and others simply lack the communication skills needed to build relationships on campus. Pathways should be multi-tiered to support young men at every stage and transition to ensure they achieve life benchmarks as successfully as possible. This effort would demand contributions from the young man's community at home and university programs, both knowledgeable of challenges unique to African American men, and willing to provide continued support.

Strengthening educational and career pathways is possible through community support, early intervention, and a multi-pronged and multi-generational approach. It will take ongoing advocacy for civil rights and anti-racist legislation to secure the financial capital that supports schools and organizations that do the work of empowering males of

color. The Church can lead this effort by acting on principles such as mercy and justice and being open to collaborating with organizations outside of the church to ensure whole-life discipleship for young men. If we, as faith leaders and lay persons, believe in faith and works, it is logical to assert that God also commissions us to help young men navigate life. This is how we can ensure we leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we found it.

APPENDIX A

DOCTORAL PROJECT PARTICIPATION FORM

Greetings Fellows!

The Literacy Lab's National Education Ambassador, Torren Cooper, is conducting a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) project and seeks the participation of Leading Men Fellowship Alumni. The eight-week project provides college and career readiness mentoring and life guidance to assist young men of color with transitions in life. If you are interested in participating, contact Torren at torrencooper@gmail.com or (202)763-2267, contact Ms. Green or Mr. Douglas.
Thank you!

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: Prophetic Activism: Strengthening Educational and Career Pathways for Young Adult African American Males in Washington, D.C.

Principal Investigator:
Torren Cooper
(202) 763 2267
Tcooper1@united.edu
United Theological Seminary

Introduction:
You are invited to participate in this research study by Torren Cooper. The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness of mentoring on African American/Black men during major life transitions. This is an eight-week project that aims to empower and equip young adult males for college, careers, and life after high school.

Purpose of the Study:
This study seeks to understand what high school male seniors and young adult men aged 18-24 in Washington, D.C., need to transition from high school to adult life successfully. Your participation will help to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring, positive peer relationships, and future initiatives to empower males of color.

Study Procedures:
1. Complete a pre-survey at the beginning of the study.
2. Participate in presentations on topics of college access and careers.
3. Participate in weekly journaling.
4. Optionally participate in an individual interview to share your experience.
5. Complete a post-survey at the end of the study.

Potential Risks:
The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal. You may experience emotional or mental discomfort while discussing personal or family-related topics. If there are any questions, discussions, or journal topics that make you uncomfortable, you may choose not to answer.

Potential Benefits:
Participants in this study may experience an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, the provision of a mentor and a community of like-minded individuals, and advice that leads to college enrollment or employment.

Confidentiality:
All information in this study will be kept confidential. Names, addresses, and other sensitive or identifying information will be redacted, summarized, or omitted. Information collected will be kept in an encrypted and password-protected location. Participants will be asked to agree to keep group discussions confidential. Data collected from this study will be used to strengthen the current program and help bolster other models in other regions.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time you wish without penalty, loss, or subjection to loss of confidentiality.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact:
Torren Cooper
(202) 763 2267
Tcooper1@united.edu

Consent:

By signing this document, you indicate that you have read and understood this information while of sound mind and agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this document for your records.

Participant Name (printed): _____
Participant Name: (Signature): _____
Date: _____
Researcher Name (printed): _____
Researcher Name: (Signature): _____

APPENDIX C

PRE-SURVEY

Pre-Survey Questionnaire
Participant #

Title of Study: Prophetic Activism: Strengthening Educational and Career Pathways for Young Adult African American Males in Washington, D.C.

PRE-SURVEY

Please choose one answer for each question.

1. **How prepared did you feel for life after high school?**

   Very prepared Prepared Neutral Not Prepared

2. **How would you rate your high school's college and career assistance for students?**

   Excellent Good Fair Poor

3. **Did you receive college and career assistance from any entity outside your high school? (e.g., a nonprofit organization, religious group, or family members)**

   Yes No

4. **Did you have a college or career plan for what you would do after high school?**

   Yes, I had a plan No, I did not have a plan

5. **Have you ever received life or career mentorship?**

   Yes No

6. **How confident are you in your knowledge of finding college and career information?**

   Very confident Confident Neutral Not confident

7. **How helpful are the Leading Men Fellowship's professional learning groups?**

   Very helpful Helpful Neutral Not helpful

8. **Do you find your experience in the Leading Men Fellowship beneficial?**

   Very beneficial Beneficial Neutral Not beneficial

9. **How has the Leading Men Fellowship increased your preparedness for college?**

   Increased significantly Significantly No change Decreased

10. **How prepared are you for future employment opportunities?**

    Very prepared Prepared Neutral Not prepared

11. **Rate your experience in the Leading Men Fellowship.**

    Very beneficial Beneficial Neutral Not beneficial

12. **How interested are you in receiving a personal life mentor?**

    Very interested Interested Neutral Not Interested

APPENDIX D

POST SURVEY

Participant #

Title of Study: Prophetic Activism: Strengthening Educational and Career Pathways for Young Adult African American Males in Washington, D.C.

POST-SURVEY (Focus Group Participant)

Please choose one answer for each question.

1. **How would you rate your college and career assistance from this focus group?**

   Excellent Good Fair Poor

2. **How prepared do you feel for life after high school after attending this workshop?**

   Very prepared Prepared Neutral Not Prepared

3. **Do you have a college or career plan for what you will do after attending this workshop?**

   Yes, I have a plan No, I don't have a plan

4. **How confident are you in your knowledge of finding college and career information?**

   Very confident Confident Neutral Not Confident

5. **How helpful were the presentations during the focus group?**

   Very helpful Helpful Neutral Not helpful

6. **How has this workshop increased your preparedness to go to college?**

   Increased significantly Increased slightly No change Decreased

7. **How prepared are you for future employment opportunities?**

   Very prepared Prepared Neutral Not Prepared

8. **How has your self-confidence changed since the focus group?**

   Increased significantly Increased slightly No change Decreased

9. **Rate your experience in the workshops.**

Very beneficial Beneficial Neutral Not beneficial

10. How interested are you in receiving a personal life mentor?

Very interested Interested Neutral Not Interested

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. Tell me who you are and why you applied for the Leading Men Fellowship.
2. Describe your experience as a senior in high school.
3. Did you experience any challenges during senior year? If so, what were they and how did you overcome them?
4. What did you plan to do after your graduation? Did you stay with that plan? Why or why not?
5. What do you wish you had or had more of during your senior year of high school?
6. Did you have anyone in your school or community to ask for help from? If yes, who was it, and how did they help?
7. Describe how you feel about your current experience as a Leading Men Fellow.
8. What motivates you to achieve your goals?
9. How could someone support you personally or professionally at this time?

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